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THE WORKS OF
ALEXANDRE DUMAS
IN THIRTY VOLUMES

MARGARET DE VALOIS

ILLUSTRATED WITH A FRONTISPIECE
IN PHOTOGRAVURE

NEW YORK
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THE following introductory remarks are extracted from a review of Dumas' Novels, etc., in BLACKWOOD'S MAGAZINE.

"On the eighteenth day of August, 1572, a great festival was held in the palace of the Louvre. It was to celebrate the nuptials of Henry of Navarre and Marguerite de Valois.

"This alliance between the chief of the Protestant party in France, and the sister of Charles IX. and daughter of Catherine de Medicis, perplexed, and in some degree alarmed, the Catholics, whilst it filled the Huguenots with joy and exultation. The king had declared that he knew and made no difference between Romanist and Calvinist—that all were alike his subjects, and equally beloved by him. He caressed the throng of Huguenot nobles and gentlemen whom the marriage had attracted to the court, was affectionate to his new brother-in-law, friendly with the Prince of Condé, almost respectful to the venerable Admiral de Coligny, to whom he proposed to confide the command of an army in a projected war with Spain. The chiefs of the Catholic party were not behindhand in following the example set them by Charles. Catherine de Medicis was all smiles and affability; the Duke of Anjou, afterwards Henry III., received graciously the compliments paid him by the Huguenots themselves on his successes at Jarnac and Moncontour, battles which he had won before he was eighteen years old; Henry of Guise, whose reputation as a leader already, at the age of two-and twenty, almost equalled that of his great father, was courteous and friendly to those whose deadly foe he had so lately been. The Duke of Mayenne and the Admiral, the Guise and the Condé, were seen riding, conversing, and making parties of pleasure together. It was the lion lying down with the lamb.

"On the twenty-second of August, four days after the marriage, in which the Huguenots saw a guarantee of the peaceful exercise of their religion, the Admiral de Coligny was passing through the street of St.-Germain-l'Auxerrois, when he was shot at and wounded by a captain of *Petardiers,* one Maurevel, who went by the name of *Le Tueur du Roi,* literally, the King's Killer. At midnight on the twenty-fourth of August, the tocsin sounded, and the massacre of St. Bartholomew began.

"It is at this stirring period of French history, abounding in horrors and bloodshed, and in plots and intrigues, that M. Alexandre Dumas commences 'Marguerite de Valois.' Beginning with the marriage of Henry and Margaret, he narrates, in his spirited and attractive style, various episodes, real and imaginary, of the great massacre, from the first fury of which Henry himself, doomed to death by the remorseless Catherine de Medicis, was only saved by his own caution, by the indecision of Charles IX., and the energy of Margaret of Valois. The marriage between the King of France's sister and the King of Navarre was merely one of *convenance,* agreed to by Henry for the sake of his fellow Protestants, and used by Catherine and Charles as a lure to bring 'those of the Religion,' as they were called, to Paris, there to be slaughtered, unsuspecting and defenseless. Margaret, then scarcely twenty years of age, had already made herself talked of by her intrigues; Henry, who was a few months younger, but who, even at that early period of his life, possessed a large share of the shrewdness and prudence for which his countrymen, the Béarnese, have at all times been noted, was, at the very time of his marriage, deeply in love with the Baroness de Sauve, one of Catherine de Medicis' ladies, by whom he was in his turn beloved. But although little affection existed between the royal pair, the strong links of interest and ambition bound them together; and no sooner were they married, than they entered into a treaty of political alliance, to which, for some time, both steadily and truly adhered.

* * * * *

"The author, according to his custom, introduces a vast array of characters, for the most part historical, all spiritedly drawn and well sustained. M. Dumas may, in various respects, be held up as an example to our history spoilers, self-styled writers of historical romance, on this side the Channel. One does not find him profaning public edifices by causing all sorts of absurdities to pass, and of twaddle to be spoken, within their precincts; neither does he make his kings and beggars, high-born dames and private soldiers, use the very same language, all equally tame, colorless, and devoid of character. The spirited and varied dialogue in which his romances abound, illustrates and brings out the qualities and characteristics of his actors, and is not used for the sole purpose of making a chapter out of what would be better told in a page. In many instances, indeed, it would be difficult for him to tell his story, by the barest narrative, in fewer words than he does by pithy and pointed dialogue."

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MARGUERITE DE VALOIS.

CHAPTER I.

M. DE GUISE'S LATIN.

On Monday, the 18th of August, 1572, there was a splendid fête at the Louvre.

The windows of the ancient royal residence were brilliantly illuminated, and the squares and streets adjacent, usually so solitary after the clock of Saint Germain-l'Auxerrois had tolled nine, were now crowded with people, although it was past midnight.

All this assemblage, threatening, pressing, and turbulent, resembled, in the gloom, a dark and rolling sea, each swell of which increases to a foaming wave; this sea extending all along the quay, spent its waves at the base of the walls of the Louvre, on the one hand, and against the Hôtel de Bourbon, which was opposite, on the other. There was in spite of the royal fête, and perhaps even because of the royal fête, something threatening in the aspect of the people.

The court was celebrating the marriage of Madame Marguerite de Valois, daughter of Henry II. and sister of King Charles IX., with Henry de Bourbon, King of Navarre; and that same morning the Cardinal de Bourbon had united the young couple with the usual ceremonial observed at the marriages of the royal daughters of France, on a stage erected at the entrance to Nôtre Dame.

This marriage had astonished everybody, and occasioned much surmise to certain persons who saw clearer than others. They could not comprehend the union of two parties who hated each other so thoroughly as did, at this moment, the Protestant party and the Catholic party; and they wondered how the young Prince de Condé could forgive the Duke d'Anjou, the king's father, for the death of his father, assassinated by Montesquiou, at Jarnac. They asked how the young Duke de Guise could pardon Admiral de Coligny for the death of his father, assassinated at Orleans by Poltrot de Méré. Moreover, Jeanne de Navarre, the courageous spouse of the weak Antoine de Bourbon, who had conducted his son Henry to the royal espousals which awaited him, had died scarcely two months before, and singular reports had been spread abroad as to this sudden death. It was everywhere whispered, and in some places said aloud, that she had discovered some terrible secret; and that Catherine de Medicis, fearing its disclosure, had poisoned her gloves, which had been made by one René, her fellow-countryman, and deeply skilled in such affairs. This report was the more spread and believed, when, after the death of this great queen, at her son's request, two celebrated physicians, one of whom was the famous Ambroise Paré, were instructed to open and examine the body, but not the skull. As it was by the smell that Jeanne de Navarre had been poisoned, it was the brain alone that could present any traces of the crime, and that was the sole part excluded from dissection. We say crime, for no one doubted for a moment that a crime had been committed.

This was not all. The king, Charles, in particular had set his heart on this union, which not only re-established peace in his kingdom, but also attracted to Paris the principal Huguenots of France, and his anxiety almost approached to obstinacy. As the two betrothed belonged one to the Catholic religion and the other to the Reformed religion, they were obliged to obtain a dispensation from Gregory XIII., who then filled the papal chair. The dispensation was slow in coming, and the delay causing great uneasiness to the late Queen of Navarre, she had one day expressed to Charles IX. her fears lest the dispensation should not arrive; to which the king replied:

"Be under no alarm, my dear aunt. I honor you more than I do the Pope, and I love my sister more than I fear his holiness. I am not a Huguenot, but neither am I a fool; and if the Pope makes any difficulties, I will myself take Margaret by the hand, and unite her to your son in the sight of open day."

This speech was soon spread through the Louvre and the city, and whilst it greatly rejoiced the Huguenots, had given the Catholics wherewithal to reflect upon; and they asked one another, with a low voice, if the king really meant to betray them, or was only playing a part which some fine morning or evening might have an unexpected finale.

It was particularly with regard to Admiral de Coligny, who for five or six years had been so bitterly opposed to the king, that the conduct of Charles IX. appeared inexplicable; after having put on his head a price of a hundred and fifty thousand golden crowns, the king now swore by him, called him his father, and declared openly that he should in future confide the conduct of the war to him alone. To such a pitch was this carried, that Catherine de Medicis herself, who until then had controlled the actions, will, and even desires of the young prince, seemed beginning to be really uneasy, and not without reason; for, in a moment of confidence, Charles IX. had said to the admiral, in reference to the war in Flanders, "My father, there is one other thing against which we must be on our guard, and this is, that the queen, my mother, who likes to poke her nose everywhere, as you well know, shall learn nothing of this undertaking; we must keep it so quiet that she does not hear a word of it or, meddler as she is, she will spoil all."

Now, wise and experienced as he was, Coligny had not kept this counsel secret; and, albeit he had come to Paris with great suspicions, and albeit at his departure from Chatillon a peasant had thrown herself at his feet, crying, "Ah! sir, our good master, do not go to Paris, for if you do you will die—you and all who are with you!"—these suspicions were lulled and almost destroyed in his breast, and in that of Teligny, his son-in-law, to whom the king was especially kind and attentive, calling him "brother," as he called the admiral his "father," and behaving to him as he did to his best friends.

The Huguenots, then, excepting some few morose and suspicious spirits, were completely re-assured. The death of the Queen of Navarre passed over, as having been caused by a pleurisy, and the spacious apartments of the Louvre were filled with those brave Protestants to whom the marriage of their young chief, Henry, promised an unexpected return of good fortune. Admiral Coligny, La Rochefoucault, the young Prince de Condé, Teligny, in short, all the leaders of the party, were triumphant when they saw so powerful at the Louvre, and so welcome in Paris, those whom, three months before, King Charles and Queen Catherine would have hanged on gibbets higher than those of assassins. The king, the queen, the Duke d'Anjou, and the Duke d'Alençon did the honors of the royal fête with all courtesy and kindness.

The Duke d'Anjou received from the Huguenots themselves well-merited compliments as to the two battles of Jarnac and Moncontour, which he had gained before he was eighteen years of age, more precocious in that than either Cæsar or Alexander, to whom they compared him, of course placing the conquerors of Pharsalia and Issus as inferior to the living prince. The Duke d'Alençon looked on, with his bland, false smile, whilst Queen Catherine, radiant with joy and diffuse in compliment, congratulated Prince Henry de Condé on his recent marriage with Marie de Clèves, and the Messieurs de Guise themselves looked gracious on the formidable enemies of their house, and the Duke de Mayenne discoursed with M. de Tavanne and the admiral on the impending war, which was now more than ever threatened against Philippe II.

In the midst of these groups moved backwards and forwards, his head a little on one side, his ear open to all that was said, a young man about nineteen years of age, with a keen eye, black hair cut very close, thick eyebrows, and a nose curved like an eagle's, with a sneering smile and a growing mustache and beard. This young man, who had first distinguished himself at the battle of Arnay-le Duc, for which he had been very highly complimented, was the dearly beloved pupil of Coligny, and the hero of the day. Three months anterior, that is to say, when his mother was living, they called him the Prince of Béarn, now he was called the King of Navarre, and in aftertime, Henry IV.

From time to time a gloomy cloud passed suddenly and rapidly over his brow; questionless, he recollected that "two months, two little months," had scarce elapsed since his mother's death, and he less than any one doubted that she had been poisoned. But the cloud was transitory, and disappeared like a fleeting shadow, for they who spoke to him, they who congratulated him, they who elbowed him, were they who had assassinated the brave Jeanne d'Albret.

Some paces distant from the King of Navarre, almost as pensive and gloomy as the king affected to be joyous and free from cares, was the young Duke de Guise, conversing with Teligny. More fortunate than the Béarnais, at two-and-twenty he had almost attained the reputation of his father, François the great Duke de Guise. He was an elegant gentleman, very tall, with a noble and haughty look, and gifted with that natural majesty, which caused it to be said that by his side other princes seemed to belong to the people. Young as he was the Catholics looked up to him as the chief of their party, as the Huguenots considered Henry of Navarre, whose portrait we have just drawn, to be their chief. He had heretofore borne the title of Prince de Joinville, and at the siege of Orleans fought his first fight under his father, who died in his arms, denouncing Admiral Coligny as his assassin. It was then the young duke, like Hannibal, took a solemn oath to avenge his father's death on the admiral and his family, and to pursue the foes to his religion without truce or respite, promising God to be his exterminating angel on earth, until the very last heretic should be cut off. It was therefore with the deepest astonishment that the people saw this prince, usually so faithful to his word, extend the hand of fellowship to those whom he had sworn to hold as his eternal enemies, and discourse familiarly with the son-in-law of the man whose death he had promised to his dying father.

But as we have said, this was an evening of astonishments.

All continued smilingly within, and a murmur more soft and flattering than ever pervaded the Louvre at the moment when the youthful bride, after having laid aside her toilette of ceremony, her long mantle and flowing veil, returned to the ball-room, accompanied by the lovely Duchess de Nevers, her most intimate friend, and led by her brother, Charles IX., who presented her to the principal guests.

The bride was the daughter of Henry II., was the pearl of the crown of France, MARGUERITE DE VALOIS, whom, in his familiar tenderness for her, King Charles IX., always called *ma sœur Margot,* "my sister Madge."

Never was a more flattering reception, never one more merited, than that which awaited the new Queen of Navarre. Marguerite at this period was scarcely twenty, and already she was the object of all the poets' eulogies, some of whom compared her to Aurora, others to Cytherea; she was, in truth, a beauty without rival in that court in which Catherine de Medicis had assembled the loveliest women of the age and country.

She had black hair and a brilliant complexion; a voluptuous eye, veiled by long lids, coral and delicate lips, a graceful neck, a full, enchanting figure, and concealed in a satin slipper a tiny foot, scarce larger than an infant's. The French, who possessed her, were proud to see so lovely a flower flourishing in their soil, and foreigners who passed through France returned home dazzled with her beauty, if they had but seen her, and amazed at her knowledge, if they had discoursed with her; for not only was Marguerite the loveliest, she was also the most erudite, woman of her time, and on all sides was quoted the remark of an Italian *savant* who had been presented to her, and who, after having conversed with her for an hour in Italian, Spanish, and Latin, had said, on quitting her presence: "To see the court without seeing Marguerite de Valois, is to see neither France nor the court."

Thus it may be supposed, that addresses to King Charles IX. and the Queen of Navarre were not wanting. The Huguenots were great hands at addresses. Many strong hints to the past, and stronger hints as to the future, were adroitly slipped into these harangues; but to all such allusions and speeches he replied, with his pale lips and artificial smiles:

"In giving my sister Margot to Henry of Navarre, I give my sister to all the Protestants of the kingdom."

This phrase assured some and made others smile, for it had really a double sense: the one paternal, and with which Charles IX. would not load his mind; the other, injurious to the bride, her husband, and also to him who said it, for it recalled some scandalous rumors with which the chroniclers of the court had already found means to smirch the nuptial robe of Marguerite de Valois.

However, M. de Guise was conversing, as we have described, with Teligny; but he did not pay to the conversation such sustained attention but that he turned away somewhat, from time to time, to cast a glance at the group of ladies, in the center of whom glittered the Queen of Navarre. When the princess's eye thus met that of the young duke, a cloud seemed to overspread that lovely brow, around which stars of diamonds formed a tremulous circlet, and some agitating thought might be divined in her restless and impatient manner.

The Princess Claude, the eldest sister of Marguerite, who had been for some years married to the Duke of Lorraine, had observed this uneasiness, and going up to her, was about to inquire the cause, when all stood aside at the approach of the queen-mother, who came forward, leaning on the arm of the young Prince de Condé, and the princess was thus suddenly shut out from her sister. There was then a general movement, by which the Duke de Guise profited to approach Madame de Nevers, his sister-in-law, and Marguerite.

Madame de Lorraine, who had not lost sight of her sister, then remarked, instead of the cloud which she had before observed on her forehead, a burning blush come into her cheeks. The duke approached still nearer, and when he was within two steps of Marguerite, she appeared rather to feel than see his presence, and turned round, making a violent effort over herself in order to give her features an appearance of calmness and indifference. The duke, then respectfully bowing, murmured, in a low tone, "*Ipse attuli.*"—"I have brought it."

Marguerite returned the salute of the young duke, and as she stooped, replied, in the same tone, "*Noctu pro more.*"—"To-night, as usual."

These words, uttered softly, were so lost in the enormous collar which the princess wore, as to be heard only by the person to whom they were addressed ; but brief as had been the conference, it doubtless composed all the young couple had to say, for after this exchange of two words for three, they separated, Marguerite more thoughtful, and the duke with his brow less clouded than when they met. This little scene took place without the person most interested appearing to remark it, for, on his side, the King of Navarre had eyes but for one individual amongst those whom Marguerite de Valois had around her, and that was the lovely Madame de Sauve.

Charlotte de Beaune Semblançay, granddaughter of the unfortunate Semblançay, and wife of Simon de Fizes, Baron de Sauve, was one of the ladies in waiting to Catherine de Medicis, and one of the most redoubtable auxiliaries of this queen, who poured forth to her enemies philters of love when she dared not pour out Italian poison. Delicately fair, and by turns sparkling with vivacity or languishing in melancholy, always ready for love or intrigue, the two great occupations which for fifty years employed the court of the three succeeding kings : a woman in every acceptation of the word, and in all the charm of the idea, from the blue eye, languishing or beaming fire, to the small and perfectly formed feet, hidden in their slippers of velvet, Madame de Sauve had already for some months seized on every faculty of the King of Navarre, then making his *débût* as lover as well as politician, so completely, that Marguerite de Valois a magnificent and royal beauty, had not even excited admiration in the heart of her spouse ; and what was more strange, and astonished all the world, even on the part of that soul so full of darkness and mystery, Catherine de Medicis, whilst she prosecuted her project of union between her daughter and the King of Navarre, had not ceased to favor almost openly his amour with Madame de Sauve. But despite this powerful aid, and despite the easy manners of the age, the lovely Charlotte had hitherto resisted ; and this resistance, unheard-of, incredible, unprecedented, even more than the beauty and wit of her who resisted, had excited in the heart of the Béarnais a passion which, unable to satisfy itself, had destroyed in the young king's heart all timidity, pride, and even that carelessness, half philosophy, half idleness, which formed the basis of his character.

Madame de Sauve had been only a few minutes in the apartment ; from spite or grief, she had at first resolved on not being present at her rival's triumph, and under the pretext of an indisposition, had allowed her husband, who had been for five years secretary of state, to go alone to the Louvre ; but when Catherine de Medicis saw the baron without his wife, had learned the cause that kept away her dear Charlotte, and that the indisposition was but slight, she wrote a few words to her, which the lady instantly obeyed. Henry, sad as he had at first been at her absence, had yet breathed more freely when he saw M. de Sauve enter alone ; but at the moment when, not expecting her appearance, he was about to pay some court to the charming creature whom he was condemned, if not to love, at least to treat as his wife, he saw Madame de Sauve arise, as it were, from the further end of the gallery. He was nailed to the place, his eyes fastened on the Circe, who enthralled him as if by magic chains, and instead of continuing his steps towards his wife, by a movement of hesitation which betrayed more astonishment than alarm, he advanced to meet Madame de Sauve.

The courtiers, seeing the King of Navarre, whose inflammable heart they knew, approach the beautiful Charlotte, had not the courage to prevent their meeting, but drew aside complaisantly ; so that at the same moment when Marguerite de Valois and M. de Guise exchanged the few words in Latin which we have noted above, Henry, having approached Madame de Sauve, began, in a French very intelligible, although with somewhat of a Gascon accent, a conversation by no means so mysterious.

'Ah, *ma mie !*" he said, "you have, then, come at the very moment when they assured me that you were unwell, and I had lost all hope of seeing you ?"

"Your majesty," replied Madame de Sauve, "would perhaps wish me to believe that it had cost you something to lose this hope ?"

"*Sang Diou !* I believe it !" replied the Béarnais ; "know you not that you are my sun by day, and my star by night ? By my faith, I was in deepest darkness till you appeared and illumined all."

"Then, monseigneur, I serve you a very ill turn.

"What mean you, *ma mie?*" inquired Henry.

"I mean that he who is master of the handsomest woman in France should only have one desire—that the light should disappear, and give way to darkness and to happiness."

"You know, cruel one, that my happiness is in the hands of one woman only, and that she laughs at poor Henry."

"Oh !" replied the baroness, "I believe, on the contrary, that it was this person who was the sport and jest of the King of Navarre."

"By my faith, dearest, you reproach me very unjustly, and I do not comprehend how so lovely a mouth can be so cruel. Do you suppose for a moment that it is I who marry myself ? No, *ventre-saint-gris*, it is not I !"

"It is I, perhaps," said the baroness, sharply.

"With your lovely eyes have you not seen farther, baroness? No, no; it is not Henry of Navarre who weds Marguerite de Valois."

"And what is it, then?"

"Why, *sang Diou!* it is the Reformed religion which marries the Pope—that's all."

"No, no; your majesty loves Madame Marguerite. And can I blame you? Heaven forbid! She is beautiful enough to be adored."

Henry reflected for a moment, and, as he reflected, a meaning smile curled the corner of his lips.

"Baroness," said he, "you have no right to seek a quarrel with me. What have you done to prevent me from espousing Madame Marguerite? Nothing. On the contrary, you have always driven me to despair, and I wed her because you love me not."

"If I had loved you, sire, I must have died in another hour."

"In another hour! What do you mean? And of what death would you have died?"

"Of jealousy!—for in another hour the Queen of Navarre will send away her women, and your majesty your gentlemen."

"Is that really the thought that occupies your mind, *ma mie?*"

"I have not said so. I only say, that if I loved you it would occupy my mind most tormentingly."

"But suppose," said Henry, "that the King of Navarre should not send away his gentlemen this evening?"

"Sire," replied Madame de Sauve, looking at the king with astonishment for once unfeigned, "you say things impossible and incredible."

"What must I do, to make you believe them?"

"Give me a proof—and that proof you cannot give me."

"Yes, baroness, yes! By Saint Henry, I will give it you!" exclaimed the king, gazing amorously on her.

"Oh, your majesty!" murmured the lovely Charlotte, with downcast eyes, "I do not comprehend."

"There are four Henries in this room, my adorable!" replied the king. "Henry de France, Henry de Condé, Henry de Guise: but there is only one Henry of Navarre."

"Well?"

"Well; if this Henry of Navarre is with you all night——"

"All night!"

"Yes; then you will be certain that he is not with any other."

"Ah! if you do that, sire," said Madame Sauve.

"On the honor of a gentleman, I will do it!"

Madame de Sauve raised her beaming and love-promising eyes to the king, whose heart beat with joy.

"And then," said Henry, "what will you say?"

"I will say," replied Charlotte, "that your majesty really loves me."

"*Ventre-saint-gris!* then you shall say it. Have you not about you some waiting-woman whom you can trust?"

"Yes, Dariole is devoted to me."

"*Sang-Diou!* then say to her, that I will make her fortune when I am King of France, as the astrologers prophesy."

Charlotte smiled, for even at this period the Gascon reputation of the Béarnais was already established with respect to his promises.

"Well, then, what do you desire of Dariole?"

"Little for her, a great deal for me. Your apartment is over mine?"

"Yes."

"Let her wait behind the door. I will strike three blows gently, and——"

Madame de Sauve kept silence for several seconds, and then, as if she had looked around her to observe if she were overheard, she fastened her gaze for a moment on the group which environed the queen-mother: brief as the moment was, it was sufficient for Catherine and her lady-in-waiting to exchange a look.

"Oh, if I were inclined," said Madame de Sauve, with a syren's accent that would have melted Ulysses himself—

"if I were inclined to make your majesty tell a falsehood——"

"*Ma mie,* try——"

"Ah, *ma foi!* I confess I am tempted to do so."

"Women are never so strong as after their defeat."

"Sire, I hold you to your promise for Dariole, when you shall be King of France."

Henry uttered an exclamation of joy.

It was at the precise moment when the cry escaped the lips of the Béarnais, that the Queen of Navarre replied to the Duke of Guise:

"*Noctu pro more.*"

Then Henry quitted Madame de Sauve as happy as the Duke de Guise when he quitted Marguerite de Valois.

An hour after the double scene we have just related, King Charles and the queen-mother also retired to their apartments. Almost immediately the apartments began to empty; the galleries exhibited the bases of their marble columns. The admiral and the Prince de Condé were escorted home by four hundred Huguenot gentlemen through the middle of the crowd, which groaned as they passed. Then Henry de Guise, with the Lorraine and Catholic gentlemen, left in their turn, greeted by the cries of joy and plaudits of the people.

As to Marguerite de Valois, Henry of Navarre, and Madame de Sauve, they lived in the Louvre.

CHAPTER II.

HENRY OF NAVARRE AND MARGUERITE.

THE Duke de Guise escorted his sister-in-law, the Duchess de Nevers, to his hotel in the Rue du Chaume, and then proceeded to his own apartment to change his dress, put on a night cloak, and arm himself with one of those short and sharp poniards which were called "*foi de gentilhomme,*" and were worn without swords; but at the moment when he took it off the table on which it was placed, he perceived a small billet between the blade and the scabbard.

He opened it, and read as follows:

"I hope M. de Guise will not return to the Louvre to-night; or if he does, that he will at least take the precaution to arm himself with a good coat of mail and a proved sword."

"Ah! ah!" said the duke, "this is a singular warning; but I always take good advice—my steel jacket and my sword."

The valet-de-chambre, accustomed to these changes of costume, brought both. The duke put on his jacket, which was made of rings of steel so fine that it was scarcely thicker than velvet; he then drew on a pardessus and pourpoint of gray and silver, his favorite colors, placed a dagger by his side, handed his sword to a page, the only attendant he allowed to accompany him, and took the way to the Louvre, which he reached in safety.

In front of the royal château was a deep fosse, looking into which were the chambers of most of the princes who inhabited the palace. Marguerite's apartment was on the first floor, and, easily accessible but for the fosse, was, in consequence of the depth to which that was cut, thirty feet from the bottom of the wall, and consequently out of the reach of robbers or lovers; but nevertheless the Duke de Guise approached it without hesitation.

At the same moment was heard the noise of a window which opened on the ground floor. This window was grated, but a hand appeared, lifted out one of the bars that had been loosened, and dropped from it a silken lace.

"Is that you, Gillonne?" said the duke, in a low voice.

"Yes, monseigneur," replied a female voice, in a still lower tone.

"And Marguerite?"

"Awaits you."

"'Tis well."

Hereupon the duke made a signal to his page, who, opening his cloak, took out a small rope ladder. The prince fastened one end to the silk lace, and Gillonne drawing it, unfastened it, and the prince, after having buckled his sword to his belt, ascended without accident. When he entered, the bar was replaced and the window closed, whilst the page, having seen his master quietly enter the Louvre, to the windows of which he had accompanied him twenty times in the same way, laid himself down in his cloak on the grass of the fosse, and beneath the shadow of the wall.

The night was extremely dark, and several large rain-spots fell from the heavy clouds charged with electric fluid.

The Duke de Guise followed his conductress, who was no other than the daughter of Jacques de Mantignon, maréchal of France. She was the confidant of Marguerite, who kept no secret from her; and it was said that amongst the number of mysteries entrusted to her incorruptible fidelity, there were some so terrible as to compel her to keep the rest.

There was no light left either in the lower chamber or in the corridor, only from time to time a livid glare illuminated the dark apartments with a vivid flash, which as instantly disappeared.

" The duke, still guided by his conductress, who held his hand, reached a staircase formed in the thickness of the wall, and which opened by a secret and invisible door into the antechamber of Marguerite's apartment.

In this antechamber, which was perfectly dark, Gillonne stopped.

" Have you brought what the queen requested ?" she inquired, in a low voice.

" Yes," replied the Duke de Guise ; " but I will only give it to her majesty in person."

" Come, then, and do not lose an instant !" said a voice from the darkness, which made the duke start, for it was Marguerite's.

At the same moment a curtain of violet velvet covered with fleurs-de-lis was raised, and the duke made out the form of the queen, who, in her impatience, had come to meet him:

"I am here, madame," he then said; and he passed the curtain, which fell behind him. Gillonne remained in the antechamber.

As if she comprehended the jealousies of the duke, Marguerite led him to the bed-chamber, and then paused.

"Well," she said, "are you content, duke?"

"Content, madame?" was the reply—"and with what?"

"Of the proof I give you," retorted Marguerite, with a slight tone of vexation in her voice, "that I belong to a man, who, on the very night of his marriage, makes me of such small importance that he does not even come to thank me for the honor I have done him, not in selecting, but in accepting him for my husband."

"Oh! madame," said the duke, sorrowfully, "be assured he will come if you desire it."

"And is it you who say that, Henry?" cried Marguerite; "you, who better than any know the contrary of what you say. If I had that desire, should I have asked you to come to the Louvre!"

"You have asked me to come to the Louvre, Marguerite, because you are anxious to destroy every vestige of the past, and because that past lives not only in my memory, but in this silver casket which I bring to you."

"Henry, shall I say one thing to you?" replied Marguerite; "it is that you are more like a schoolboy than a prince. I deny that I have loved you! I desire to quench a flame which will die, perhaps, but whose reflection will never die! No, no, duke; you may keep the letters of your Marguerite, and the casket she has given you. From these letters she asks but one, and that only, because it is as dangerous for you as for herself."

"It is all yours," said the duke.

Marguerite searched anxiously in the open casket, and with a tremulous hand took, one after the other, a dozen letters, of which she examined the addresses only, as if by the inspection alone of these she could recall to her memory what the letters themselves contained; but after a close scrutiny, she looked at the duke, pale and agitated:

"Sir," she said, "what I seek is not here. Have you lost it, by any accident?"

"What letter do you seek, madame?"

"That in which I told you to marry without delay."

"As an excuse for your infidelity?"

Marguerite shrugged her shoulders.

"No; but to save your life. That one in which I say to you that the king, seeing our love and my exertions to break off your proposed espousals with the Infanta of Portugal, has sent for his brother, the Bastard of Angoulême, and said to him, pointing to two swords, 'With this slay Henry de Guise this night or with the other I will slay thee in the morning.' Where is that letter?"

"Here," said the duke, drawing it from his breast.

Marguerite snatched it from his hands, opened it anxiously, assured herself that it was really that which she desired, uttered an exclamation of joy, and applying the lighted candle to it, the flames instantly consumed the paper: then, as if Marguerite feared that her imprudent words might be read in the very ashes, she trampled them underfoot.

During all this, the Duke de Guise had watched his mistress attentively.

"Well, Marguerite," he said, when she had finished, "are you satisfied now?"

"Yes, for now you have wedded the Princess de Porcian, my brother will forgive me your love: whilst he never would have pardoned me for revealing a secret such as that which in my weakness for you I had not the strength to conceal from you."

"True," replied De Guise, "then, you loved me."

"And I love you still, Henry, as much—more than ever!"

"You . . . . ?"

"I do; for never more than at this moment did I need a sincere and devoted friend. Queen, I have no throne: wife, I have no husband!"

The young prince shook his head sorrowfully.

"I tell you, I repeat to you, Henry, that my husband not only does not love me, but hates—despises me; besides, methinks, your presence in the chamber in which he ought to be is full of proof of this hatred, this contempt."

"It is not yet late, madame, and the King of Navarre requires time to dismiss his gentlemen; and if he has not already come, he will not be long first."

"And I tell you," cried Marguerite, with increasing vexation, "I tell you that he will not come!"

"Madame!" exclaimed Gillonne, suddenly entering—"the King of Navarre is just leaving his apartment!"

"Oh, I knew he would come!" exclaimed the Duke de Guise.

"Henry," said Marguerite, in a quick tone, and seizing the duke's hand, "Henry, you shall see if I am a woman of my word, and if I may be relied on. Henry, enter that closet."

"Madame, allow me to go whilst it is yet time, for reflect that the first mark of love you bestow on him, I shall quit the cabinet, and then woe to him!"

"Are you mad? go in—go in, I say, and I will be responsible for all." And she pushed the duke into the closet.

It was time. The door was scarcely closed behind the prince, than the King of Navarre, escorted by two pages who carried eight flambeaux of pink wax in two candelabras, appeared, smiling, on the threshold of the chamber.

Marguerite concealed her trouble, and made a very low courtesy.

"You are not yet in bed, madame," observed the Béarnais, with his frank and joyous look. "Were you by chance waiting for me?"

"No, sir," replied Marguerite; "for yesterday you repeated to me that our marriage was a political alliance, and that you would never thwart my wishes."

"Assuredly; but that is no reason why we should not confer a little together. Gillonne, close the door, and leave us."

Marguerite, who was sitting, then rose and extended her hand, as if to desire the pages to remain.

"Must I call your women?" inquired the king. "I will do so, if such be your desire, although I confess that what I have to say to you would make me prefer our being alone."

And the King of Navarre advanced towards the closet.

"No!" exclaimed Marguerite, hastily going before him; "no—there is no occasion for that; I am ready to hear you."

The Béarnais had learned what he desired to know—he threw a rapid and penetrating glance towards the cabinet, as if, in spite of the thick curtain which hung before it, he would dive into its obscurity, and then, turning his looks to his lovely wife, pale with terror, he said with the utmost composure:

"In that case, madame, let us confer for a few moments."

"As your majesty pleases," said the lady, falling into, rather than sitting upon, the seat which her husband pointed out to her.

The Béarnais placed himself beside her.

"Madame," he continued, "whatever many persons may have said, I think our marriage is a good marriage. I stand well with you—you stand well with me."

"But——" said Marguerite, alarmed.

"Consequently, we ought," observed the King of Navarre, "to act to each other like good allies, since we were to-day allied in the presence of God. Don't you think so?"

"Unquestionably, sir."

"I know, madame, how great your penetration is; I know how the ground at court is intersected with dangerous abysses; now I am young, and although I never injured any person, I have a great many enemies. In which camp, madame, ought I to range her who bears my name, and who has vowed her affection to me at the foot of the altar?"

"Sir, could you think——"

"I think nothing, madame; I hope and I am anxious to know that my hope is well founded. It is quite certain that our marriage is merely a pretext or a snare."

Marguerite started, for perchance the same thought had occurred to her own mind.

"Now, then, which of the two?" continued Henry of Navarre. "The king hates me, the Duke d'Anjou hates me, the Duke d'Alençon hates me, Catherine de Medicis hated my mother too much not to hate me."

"Oh, sir, what are you saying?"

"The truth, madame," replied the king; "and I wish in order that it may not be supposed that I am the dupe of the assassination of M. de Mouy and the poisoning of my mother, that some one were here who could hear me."

"Oh, sir," replied Marguerite, with an air as calm and smiling as she could assume, "you know very well that there is no person here but you and myself."

"It is for that very reason that I thus give vent to my thoughts; this it is that emboldens me to declare that I am not the dupe of the caresses showered on me by the House of France or the House of Lorraine."

"Sir, sir!" exclaimed Maguerite.

"Well, what is it, *ma mie?*" inquired Henry, smiling in his turn.

"Why, sir, such remarks are very dangerous."

"Not when we are alone," observed the king. "I was saying——"

Marguerite was evidently distressed; she desired to stop every word the king uttered, but he continued, with his apparent indifference—

"I was telling you, that I was menaced on all sides; menaced by the king, menaced by the Duke d'Alençon, menaced by the Duke d'Anjou, menaced by the queen-mother, menaced by the Duke de Guise, by the Duke de Mayenne, by the Cardinal de Lorraine—menaced, in fact, by everybody. One feels that instinctively, as you know, madame. Well, against all these menaces, which must soon become attacks, I can defend myself by your aid, for you are beloved by all the persons who detest me."

"I?" said Marguerite.

"Yes, you," replied Henry, with the utmost easiness of manner; "yes, you are beloved by King Charles, you are beloved (he laid strong emphasis on the word) by the Duke d'Alençon, you are beloved by Queen Catherine, and you are beloved by the Duke de Guise."

"Sir!" murmured Marguerite.

"Yes; and what is there astonishing in the fact of all the world loving you? All I have mentioned are your brothers or relatives. To love one's brothers and relatives is to live according to the heart of God."

"But what, then," asked Marguerite, greatly overcome—"what would you have?"

"I would say, that if you will—I will not ask you to love me—but if you will be my ally, I could brave everything; whilst, on the other hand, if you become my enemy, I am lost."

"Oh, your enemy!—never, sir!" exclaimed Marguerite.

"And my love—never either?"

"Perhaps——"

"And my ally?"

"Most decidedly."

And Marguerite turned round, and presented her hand to the king.

Henry took it, kissed it gallantly, and retaining it in his own, more from a desire of investigation than from any sentiment of tenderness, said:

"Well, madame, I believe you, and accept the alliance. They married us without our knowing each other—without our loving each other; they married us without consulting us—us whom they united. We therefore owe nothing to each other, as man and wife; but we ally ourselves freely and without any compulsion. We ally ourselves, as two loyal hearts who owe each other mutual protection should ally themselves; 'tis as such you understand it?"

"Yes, sir," said Marguerite, endeavoring to withdraw her hand.

"Well, then," continued the Béarnais, with his eyes fixed on the cabinet, "as the first proof of a frank alliance is the most perfect confidence, I will now, madame, relate to you, in all its details, the plan I have formed, in order that we may victoriously meet and overcome all these enemies."

"Sir," said Marguerite, turning her eyes toward the closet, whilst the Béarnais, seeing his trick succeed, laughed in his sleeve.

"This is what I mean to do," he continued, without appearing to remark the uneasiness of his young wife, "I intend——"

"Sir," said Marguerite, rising hastily, and seizing the king's arm—"allow me a little breath; my emotion—the heat—overpowers me."

And, in truth, Marguerite was as pale and trembling as if she was about to fall on the carpet.

Henry went straight to a window, some distance off, and opened it. This window looked on the river.

Marguerite followed him. "Silence, sire—silence, for pity's sake!" she murmured.

"What, madame," said the Béarnais, with his peculiar smile, "did you not say we were alone?"

"Yes, sir; but have you not heard me say that by the aid of a tube introduced into the ceiling or the wall everything could be heard?"

"Well, madame, well," said the Béarnais, earnestly, and in a low voice; "it is true you do not love me, but you are, at least, honorable."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"I mean that if you were capable of betraying me, you would have allowed me to continue, as I might have betrayed myself. You stopped me—I now know that some one is concealed here—that you are an unfaithful wife, but a faithful ally; and at this moment I have more need of fidelity in politics than in love."

"Sir!" replied Marguerite, confused.

"Good, good; we will talk of this hereafter," said Henry, "when we know each other better."

Then, raising his voice—"Well," he continued, "do you breathe more freely now, madame?"

"Yes, sir—yes!"

"Well, then," said the Béarnais, "I will no longer intrude on you. I owed you my respects and some advances towards better acquaintance; deign, then, to accept them, as they are offered, with all my heart. Good night, and happy slumbers!"

Marguerite raised to her husband her eyes, brilliant with gratitude, and in her turn, extended her hand.

"It is agreed," she said.

"Political alliance, frank and loyal?" asked Henry.

"Frank and loyal," was the reply.

And the Béarnais went towards the door, followed by Marguerite's look. Then, when the curtain had fallen between them and the bedchamber:

"Thanks, Marguerite," he said, in a quick and low tone, "thanks! You are a true daughter of France. I leave you quite tranquil; lacking your love, your friendship will not fail me. I rely on you, as you, for your part, may rely on me. Adieu, madame."

And Henry kissed his wife's hand, and pressed it gently. Then with a quick step he returned to his own apartment, saying to himself in a low voice, in the corridor:

"Who the devil is with her? Is it the king, or the Duke d'Anjou, or the Duke d'Alençon, or the Duke de Guise? is it a brother or a lover—is it both? I' faith, I am almost sorry now I asked the baroness for this rendezvous; but, as my word is pledged, and Dariole awaits me, no matter. Yet, *ventre-saint-gris!* this Margot, as my brother-in-law, King Charles, calls her, is an adorable creature."

And with a step which betrayed a slight hesitation, Henry of Navarre ascended the staircase which led to Madame de Sauve's apartments.

Marguerite had followed him with her eyes until he disappeared. Then she returned to her chamber and found the duke at the door of the cabinet. The sight almost touched her with remorse.

The duke was grave, and his knitted brow bespoke bitter reflection.

"Marguerite is neutral to-day," he said—"Marguerite will be hostile in a week."

"Ah! you have been listening?" said Marguerite.

"What else could I do in the cabinet?"

"And did you find that I behaved otherwise than the Queen of Navarre should behave?"

"No; but differently from the way in which the mistress of the Duke de Guise should behave."

"Sir," replied the queen, "I may not love my husband, but no one has the right to require me to betray him. Would you yourself reveal the secrets of the Princess de Porcian, your wife?"

"Come, come, madame," answered the duke, shaking his head, "this is very well; I see that you do not love me as in those days when you disclosed to me the plot of the king against me and my party."

"The king was strong, and you were weak; Henry is weak, and you are strong. You see I play a consistent part."

"Only you pass from one camp to another."

"That was a right I acquired, sir, in saving your life."

"Good, madame: and as when lovers separate, they return all the gifts that have passed between them, I will save your life, in my turn, and we shall be quits."

And bowing politely, the duke left the room, nor did Marguerite attempt to retain him.

In the antechamber he found Gillonne, who guided him to the window on the ground floor, and in the fosse he found his page, with whom he returned to the Hôtel de Guise.

Marguerite went to the opened window.

"What a marriage night!" she murmured to herself; "the husband flies—the lover forsakes me!"

She shut the window, and called Gillonne to help her to undress and retire to bed.

CHAPTER III.

THE POET-KING.

The morrow and the following days were passed in a succession of balls, tournaments, and banquets. The king seemed to have laid aside his usual melancholy and the queen-mother was so occupied with embroidery, ornaments, and plumes that she could not sleep.

The Huguenots, in some measure appeased, began to assume silken pourpoints, wear devices, and parade before certain balconies, as if they were Catholics.

On every side the reaction in favor of the Protestants was so great, that it seemed that the Court was about to become Protestant itself; even the admiral, in spite of his discernment, was deceived, and was so carried away, that one evening he forgot for two whole hours his toothpick, which he always used from two o'clock, the hour at which he dined, until eight o'clock at night, when he sat down to supper.

The evening on which the admiral thus unaccountably deviated from his usual habit, King Charles IX. had invited Henry of Navarre and the Duke de Guise to sup with him: after the repast, he went into his chamber, and was busily explaining to them the mechanism of a wolf-trap he had invented, when interrupting himself—"The Admiral does not come to-night," said he; "who has seen him to-day, and can tell me anything about him?"

"I have," said the King of Navarre; "and should your majesty be anxious about him, I can reassure you, for I saw him this morning at six, and this evening at seven o'clock."

"Ah, ah!" replied the king, whose eyes were instantly fixed with a searching expression on his brother-in-law; "for a new-married man, Harry, you are very early."

"Yes, sire," answered the King of Navarre, "I wished to inquire of the admiral, who knows everything, whether some gentlemen I expect are on their way hither."

"More gentlemen! why, you had eight hundred on the day of your wedding, and fresh ones join you every day. you are surely not going to invade us?" said Charles IX., smiling.

The Duke de Guise frowned.

"Sire," returned the Béarnais, "a war with Flanders is spoken of, and I am collecting round me all those gentlemen of my country whom I think can be useful to your majesty."

The duke, calling to mind the pretended project Henry had mentioned to Marguerite the day of their marriage, listened still more attentively.

"Well, well," replied the king, with a sinister smile, "the more the better; let them all come. But who are these gentlemen?—brave ones, I trust?"

"I know not, sire, if my gentlemen will ever equal those of your majesty, of the Duke d'Anjou, or of the Duke de Guise, but I know that they will do their best."

"Do you expect many?"

"Ten or twelve, perhaps."

"What are their names?"

"Sire, I cannot at this moment call any of them to mind, with the exception of one, whom Teligny recommends to me as a most accomplished gentleman, and whose name is De la Mole."

"De la Mole!" said the king, who was perfectly acquainted with the genealogy of all the noble families of France—"is he not a Lerac de la Mole, a Provençal?"

"Exactly so, sire; you see, I recruit even in Provence."

"And I," added the Duke de Guise, with a sarcastic smile, "go even further than the King of Navarre, for I seek even in Piedmont all the brave Catholics I can find."

"Catholic or Huguenot," interrupted the king, "it little matters to me, so they are brave."

The expression of the king's face whilst he uttered these words, which thus united Catholics and Huguenots in his thoughts, was so full of indifference, that the duke himself was surprised.

"Your majesty is occupied with the Flemings," said the admiral, to whom Charles had some days previously accorded the favor of entering without being announced, and who had overheard the king's last words.

"Ah! here is my father, the admiral," cried Charles, opening his arms. "We were speaking of battles, of gentlemen, of brave men—and *he* comes. It is like the loadstone, that attracts the iron. My brother-in-law of Navarre and my cousin of Guise were speaking of reinforcements they expect for your army. That was the subject of our conversation."

"And these reinforcements are come," said the admiral.

"Have you any intelligence of them, monsieur?" asked the Béarnais.

"Yes, my son, and particularly of M. de la Mole; he was at Orleans yesterday, and will be in Paris to-morrow, or the day after."

"The devil! You must be a sorcerer, M. l'Admiral," said the Duke de Guise, "to know what is passing at thirty or forty leagues' distance. For my part, I should like to know for a certainty what will happen, or what has happened, at Orleans."

Coligny remained unmoved by this speech, which evidently alluded to the death of François de Guise, the duke's father, killed before Orleans by Poltrot de Méré, and not without a suspicion of the admiral's having been concerned in the murder.

"Sir," replied he, coldly, and with dignity, "I am a sorcerer whenever I wish to know anything that concerns my own affairs or those of the king. My courier arrived an hour ago from Orleans, having traveled, thanks to the post, thirty-two leagues in a day. As M. de la Mole only has his own horse, he rides but ten leagues a day, and can only arrive in Paris on the 24th. Here is all my magic."

"Bravo, my father!" cried Charles IX.; "teach these young men what the wisdom is, accompanied by age, which has whitened your hair and beard; so now we will send them to talk of love and tournaments, and we will ourselves discourse of our wars. Good councilors make good kings. Leave us, gentlemen; we would be alone."

The two young men left the apartment; the King of Navarre first, then the Duke de Guise; but outside the door they separated, after a formal salute.

Coligny followed them with his eyes, not without disquietude; for he never saw these two men, who cherished so deadly a hate against each other, meet, without a dread that some spark would kindle a conflagration. Charles saw what was passing in his mind, and, laying his hand on his arm:

"Fear nothing, my father: I am here to preserve peace and obedience. I am really a king, now that my mother is no longer queen, and she is no longer queen since Coligny became my father."

"Oh, sire!" said the admiral, "the Queen Catherine——"

"Is a quarrel-monger. Peace is impossible with her. These Italian Catholics are furious, and will hear of nothing but extermination; now, for my part, I not only wish to pacify, but I wish to protect those of the Reformed religion. The others are too dissolute, and scandalize me with their amours and their quarrels. Shall I speak frankly to you?" continued Charles, redoubling in energy. "I mistrust every one about me, except my new friends. I suspect the ambition of Tavannes; Vieilleville only cares for good wine, and would betray his king for a cask of Malvoisie; Montmorency only thinks of the chase, and lives amongst his dogs and falcons; the Count de Retz is a Spaniard; the Guises are Lorraines. I think there are no true Frenchmen in France, except myself, my brother-in-law of Navarre, and yourself; but I am chained to the throne, and cannot command the army; it is as much as I can do to hunt at St. Germains or Rambouillet. My brother-in-law of Navarre is too young and too inexperienced, besides, he seems to me exactly like his father Antoine, ruined by women. There is but you, my father, who can be called, at the same time, brave as Cæsar and wise as Plato; so that I scarcely know what to do—keep you near me, as my adviser, or send you to the army, as its general. If you counsel me, who will command? If you command, who will counsel me?"

"Sire," said Coligny, "we must conquer first, and then take counsel after the victory."

"That is your advice—so be it. Monday you shall leave for Flanders, and I for Amboise."

"Your majesty leaves Paris, then?"

"Yes; I am weary of this confusion, and of these fêtes. I am not a man of action; I am a dreamer. I was not born to be a king: I was born to be a poet. You shall form a council—as long as my mother has no influence there, all will go well. I have already sent word to Ronsard to meet me, and at this moment I must go and reply to a sonnet my dear and illustrious poet has sent me. I cannot, therefore, now give you the documents necessary to make you acquainted with the question now debating between Philip II. and myself. There is, besides, a plan of the campaign drawn up by my ministers. I will find it all for you, and give it to you to-morrow."

"At what o'clock, sire?"

"At ten o'clock; and if by chance I am busy making verses, or in my cabinet writing, well—you will find all the papers in this red morocco portfolio. The color is remarkable, and you cannot mistake it. I am now going to write to Ronsard."

"Adieu, sire!"

"Adieu, my father!"

"Your hand——"

"What, my hand? In my arms, in my heart, there is your place! Come, my old soldier, come!"

And Charles, drawing Coligny towards him as he inclined himself before him, pressed his lips to his forehead.

The admiral wiped a tear from his eyes as he left the room.

Charles followed him with his eyes as long as he could see, and listened as long as he could catch a sound; and when he could no longer hear or see anything, he turned and entered his small armory. This armory was the favorite apartment of the king. It was there he took his fencing lessons with Pompée, and his lessons of poetry with Ronsard. He had assembled there all the most costly arms he had been able to collect. The walls were hung with axes, shields, spears, halberds, pistols, and muskets, and that day a famous armorer had brought him a magnificent arquebuss, on the barrel of which were encrusted, in silver, these four verses composed by the royal poet himself :

> "Pour maintenir la foy,
> Je suis belle et fidèle,
> Aux ennemis du Roi,
> Je suis belle et cruelle."

Charles entered, as we have said, this room, and after having shut the door by which he had entered, he raïsed the tapestry that masked a passage leading into a little chamber, where a female, kneeling, was saying her prayers.

As this movement was executed noiselessly, and the footsteps of the king were deadened by the thick carpet, the female heard no sound, and continued to pray. Charles stood for a moment pensively looking at her.

She was a woman of thirty-four or thirty-five years of age, whose masculine beauty was set off by the costume of the peasants of Caux. She wore the high cap so much the fashion at the court of France during the time of Isabel of Bavaria, and her bodice was red and embroidered with gold, like those of the *contadine* of Nettuno and Sora. The apartment which she had for nearly twenty years occupied, was close to the bedchamber of the king, and presented a singular mixture of elegance and rusticity. The palace had encroached upon the cottage, and the cottage upon the palace, so that the chamber was between the simplicity of the peasant and the luxury of the court lady.

The *prie-dieu* on which she knelt was of oak, beautifully carved, covered with velvet, and embroidered with gold, whilst the Bible (for she was of the Reformed religion), from which she was reading was very old and torn, like those found in the poorest cottages.

"Eh, Madelon!" said the king.

The kneeling female lifted her head smilingly at the well known voice, and rising from her knees,—

"Ah! it is you, my son," said she.

"Yes, nurse, come here."

Charles IX. let fall the curtain, and sat down on the arm of a large chair. The nurse appeared.

"What do you want with me, Charles?"

"Come near, and answer in a low tone."

The nurse approached him with familiarity.

"Here I am," said she; "speak!"

"Is the person I sent for there?"

"He has been there half an hour."

Charles rose from his seat, approached the window, looked to assure himself there were no eavesdroppers, went towards the door, and looked out there also, shook the dust from his trophies of arms, patted a large greyhound which followed him wherever he went, stopping when he stopped, and moving when he moved—then returning to his nurse:

"Let him come in, nurse," said he.

The nurse disappeared by the same passage by which she had entered, whilst the king went and leaned against a table on which were scattered arms of every kind. scarcely had he done so, when the tapestry was again lifted, and the person whom he expected entered.

He was a man of about forty, his large gray eyes full of treachery and falsehood, his nose curved like the beak of a screech-owl, his cheek-bones prominent. His face in vain sought to assume an expression of respect, but naught but fear appeared on his blanched lips.

Charles gently put his hand behind him, and grasped the butt of a pistol of a new construction, that was discharged not by a match, as formerly, but by a flint brought in contact with a wheel of steel. He fixed his eyes steadily on the newcomer, whilst he whistled with the most perfect precision, one of his favorite hunting airs.

After a pause of some minutes, during which the expression of the stranger's visage grew more and more discomposed.

"You are the person," said the king, "called François de Louviers Maurevel ?"

"Yes, sire."

"Captain of musqueteers ?"

"Yes, Sire."

"I wished to see you."

Maurevel inclined himself profoundly.

"You know," continued Charles, laying a stress on each word, "that I love all my subjects equally ?"

"I know," stammered Maurevel, "that your majesty is the father of your people."

"And that the Huguenots and Catholics are equally my children ?"

Maurevel remained silent, but his agitation was manifest to the piercing eyes of the king, although he was almost concealed in the obscurity.

"This displeases you," said the king, "who are so great an enemy to the Huguenots."

Maurevel fell on his knees.

"Sire," stammered he, "believe that——"

"I believe," continued Charles, whose eye now changed its glassy look for one that seemed of fire—"I believe that you had a great desire at Moncontour to kill the admiral, who has just left me; I believe you missed your aim, and that then you entered the army of my brother, the Duc d'Anjou; I believe that you enlisted into the company of M. de Mouy de St. Phale."

"Oh, Sire !"

"A brave gentleman from Picardy."

"Sire, sire !" cried Maurevel, "do not overwhelm me."

"He was a brave soldier," continued Charles, whose features assumed an aspect of almost ferocious cruelty, "who received you as if you had been his son; fed you, lodged you, and clothed you."

Maurevel uttered a despairing sigh.

"You called him your father, and a tender friendship existed between you and the young De Mouy."

Maurevel, still on his knees, bent himself more and more; the king stood immovable, like a statue whose lips only are endowed with vitality.

"By the way," continued the king, "M. de Guise was to give you ten thousand crowns if you killed the admiral—was he not?" The assassin struck his forehead against the floor.

"One day that your father, the Sieur de Mouy, reconnoitred near Chevreux, he let his whip fall, and dismounted to pick it up. You were then alone with him; you took a pistol from your holster, and shot him in the back; then seeing he was dead—for you killed him on the spot—you escaped on the horse he had given you. This is your history, I believe?"

And as Maurevel remained mute under this accusation, every circumstance of which was true, the king began to whistle again, with the same precision and melody, the same hunting air.

"Now then, murderer!" said he, "do you know I have a great mind to hang you?"

"Oh, sire!" cried Maurevel.

"Young De Mouy entreated me to do so only yesterday, and I scarcely knew what answer to make him, for his demand was but just."

Maurevel clasped his hands.

"All the more just, since I am, as you say, the father of my people; and that, as I answered you now, I being reconciled to the Huguenots, they are as much my children as the Catholics."

"Sire," said Maurevel, in despair, "my life is in your hands; do with it what you will."

"You are quite right, and I would not give a halfpenny for it."

"But, sire," asked the assassin, "is there no means of redeeming my crime?"

"None, that I know of; only in your place—but thank God I am not——"

"Well, sire, were you in my place?" murmured Maurevel.

"I think I could extricate myself," said the king.

Maurevel raised himself on one knee and one hand, fixing his eyes upon Charles.

"I am very fond of young De Mouy," said the king; "but, I am equally fond of my cousin of Guise; and if my cousin asked me to spare a man that the other wanted me to hang, I confess I should be embarrassed; but for policy as well as religion's sake I should comply with Guise's request; for De Mouy, although a brave gentleman, is but a petty personage compared with a prince of Lorraine."

During these words, Maurevel slowly rose, like a man whose life is saved.

"As in your situation it is very important to gain the duke's favor, listen to what he said to me last night.

Maurevel drew nearer.

"'Imagine, sire,' said he to me, 'that every morning, at ten o'clock, my deadliest enemy passes down the Rue Saint Germain-l'Auxerrois, on his return from the Louvre. I see him from a barred window in the room of my old preceptor, the Canon Pierre Pile, and I pray the devil to open the earth and swallow him in its abysses.'—Now, Maurevel, perhaps if you were the devil, it would please the duke?"

"But, sire," stammered Maurevel, "I cannot make the earth open."

"You made it open, however, wide enough for De Mouy. It was with a pistol that——. Have you this famous pistol still?"

"I am a better marksman, sire, with an arquebuss than a pistol," replied Maurevel, now quite reassured.

"Never mind," said the king; "I am sure M. de Guise will not care how it is done, so it be done."

"But," said Maurevel, "I must have a weapon I can rely on, as, perhaps, I shall have to fire from a long distance."

"I have ten arquebusses in this chamber," replied Charles IX., "with which I hit a crown-piece at a hundred and fifty paces—will you try one?"

"Most willingly, sire!" cried Maurevel, advancing towards the one that had been that day brought to the king.

"No; not that one," said the king; "I reserve that for myself. Some day I will have a grand hunt, and then I hope to use it. Take any other you like."

Maurevel detached one from a trophy. "And who is this enemy, sire?" asked he.

"How should I know," replied Charles, with a contemptuous look.

"I must ask M. de Guise, then," faltered Maurevel.

The king shrugged his shoulders.

"Do not ask," said he; "for M. de Guise will not answer. People do not generally answer such questions; it is for those who do not wish to be hanged to guess."

"But how shall I know him?"

"I tell you he passes the canon's house ever morning at ten o'clock."

"So many pass, would your majesty deign to give me any certain sign?"

"Oh, to-morrow he will carry a red morrocco portfolio under his arm."

"That is sufficient, sire."

"You have still the horse M. de Mouy gave you, have you not?"

"Sire, I have a horse that is fleeter than any other in France."

"Oh, I am not in the least anxious about you; only it is as well to let you know there is a back-door."

"Thanks, sire; pray Heaven for me!"

"Oh, pray to the devil rather; for by his aid only can you escape a halter."

"Adieu, sire."

"Adieu! By the way, M. de Maurevel, remember, that if I hear of you before ten to-morrow, or do *not* hear of you afterwards, there is an *oubliette* at the Louvre."

And Charles began to whistle, with more than usual precision, his favorite air.

CHAPTER IV.

THE EVENING OF THE 24TH OF AUGUST, 1572.

OUR readers have not forgotten that in the previous chapter Henry was anxiously expecting the arrival of a gentleman named De la Mole.

This young gentleman, as the admiral had anticipated, entered Paris by the gate of Saint Marcel, the evening of the 24th of August, 1572 ; and bestowing a contemptuous glance on the numerous hostelries that displayed their picturesque signs on either side of him, he rode on into the heart of the city, and after having crossed the Place Maubert, Le Petit-Pont, the Pont-Nôtre-Dame, and along the quay, he stopped at the end of the Rue de l'Arbre-Sec.

The name pleased him, no doubt, for he entered the street, and finding on his left a large plate of iron swinging, creaking on its hinges, he stopped, and read these words, "*La belle Etoile,*" written on a scroll beneath the sign, which was a most attractive one for a traveler, as it represented a fowl roasting in the midst of a black sky, whilst a man in a red cloak held out his hands and his purse towards it.

"Here," said the gentleman to himself, "is an inn that promises well, and the landlord must be a most ingenious fellow. I have always heard that the Rue de l'Arbre-Sec was near the Louvre ; and provided that the interior answers to the exterior, I shall be admirably lodged."

Whilst this monologue was going on, another person entered the other end of the street, and stopped also to admire the sign of *La belle Etoile.*

The gentleman whom we already know, at least, by name, rode a white horse, and wore a black doublet ornamented with jet; his cloak was of violet velvet, his boots were of black leather, and the hilts of his sword and dagger were of steel, beautifully worked; his age from twenty-four to twenty-five, his complexion dark, his eyes blue; a small mustache shaded a beautifully cut mouth, full of pearly teeth, that seemed, whenever he showed them, to light up his whole face with a smile of melancholy sweetness.

Nothing could form a greater contrast with him than the second traveler. Beneath his slouched hat appeared a profusion of hair, rather red than brown; large gray eyes that on the slightest occasion sparkled so fiercely, that they seemed black; a fair complexion, a light mustache, and splendid teeth, completed his description; and he was, with his white skin and fine form, what is generally termed a handsome cavalier, and during the last hour, which he had employed in staring up at all the windows, the ladies had honored him with no small share of their attention.

He it was who first addressed the other gentleman, who was with himself looking at the sign of *La belle Etoile.*

"*Mordi!* monsieur," said he, with the accent that characterizes the natives of Piedmont—"we are close to the Louvre, are we not? At all events, I think your choice is the same as mine, and I am highly flattered by it."

"Monsieur," replied the other, with a provincial accent that rivaled that of his companion, "I believe this inn is near the Louvre, but I have not yet made up my mind to enter it."

"You are undecided: the house is tempting, nevertheless. You must allow the sign is very inviting."

"Very! and it is for that very reason I mistrust it, for Paris is full of sharpers, and you may be just as well tricked by a sign as by anything else."

"*Mordi!*" replied the Piedmontese, "I don't care a fig for their tricks; and if the host does not serve me a chicken as well roasted as the one on his sign, I will put him on the spit and roast him instead. Come, let us go in."

"You have decided me," said the Provençal, laughing; "precede me, I beg."

"Impossible, monsieur—I could not think of it; for I am only your most obedient servant, the Count Annibal de Coconnas."

"And I, monsieur, but the Count Joseph Boniface de Lerac de la Mole, equally at your service."

"Since that is the case, let us take each other's arm, and go in so."

The result of this proposition was, that the two young men got off their horses, threw the bridles to the ostler, linked arms, adjusted their swords, and advanced towards the door of the inn, where stood mine host, who did not seem to notice them, so busy was he talking with a tall man, wrapped in a large sad-colored cloak like an owl buried in her feathers.

The two gentlemen were so near the host and his friend in the sad-colored cloak, that Coconnas, impatient at being thus neglected, touched his sleeve.

He appeared suddenly to perceive them, and dismissed his friend with an "*Au revoir!* be sure and let me know the hour appointed."

"Well, monsieur *le drôle*," said Coconnas, "do not you see we have business with you?"

"I beg pardon, gentlemen," said the host; "I did not see you."

"Eh, *mordi!* then you ought to have seen us; and now that you do see us, say 'M. le comte,' and not merely 'Monsieur.'"

La Mole stood by, leaving Coconnas, who seemed to have undertaken the affair, to speak; but it was plain, from the expression of his face, that he was fully prepared to act upon occasion.

"Well, what is your pleasure, M. le comte?" asked the landlord, in a quiet tone.

"Ah, that's better; is it not?" said Coconnas, turning to La Mole, who inclined his head affirmatively. "Monsier le comte and myself wish to sup and sleep here to-night."

"Gentlemen," said the host, "I am very sorry, but I have only one chamber, and I am afraid that would not suit you."

"So much the better," said La Mole; "we will go and lodge somewhere else."

"I shall stay here," said Coconnas; "my horse is tired. I will have the room, since you will not."

"Ah! that is quite different," replied the host, coolly. "I cannot lodge you at all, then."

"*Mordi!*" cried Coconnas, "here's a pretty fellow! Just now you could not lodge us because we were two, and now you have not room for one. You will not lodge us at all, then?"

"Since you take this high tone, gentlemen, I will answer you frankly."

"Answer, then; only answer quickly."

"Well, then, I would rather not have the honor of lodging you at all."

"For what reason?" asked Coconnas, growing white with rage.

"Because you have no servants, and for one master's room full, I should have two servants' rooms empty; so that, if I let you have the master's room, I run the risk of not letting the others."

"M. de la Mole," said Coconnas, "do you not think we ought to thrash this fellow?"

"Decidedly," said La Mole, preparing himself, together with Coconnas, to lay his whip over the host's back."

But the landlord, despite this demonstration, contented himself with retreating a step or two.

"It is easy to see," said he in a tone of raillery, "that these gentlemen are from the provinces. At Paris, it is no longer the fashion to kill innkeepers—only great men are killed nowadays; and if you make any disturbance, I will call my neighbors, and instead of you beating *me*, *you* shall be beaten yourselves."

"*Mordi!*" cried Coconnas, in a rage; "he is laughing at us."

"Gregoire, my arquebuss," said the host, with the same voice with which he would have said, "Give these gentlemen a chair."

"*Trippe del papa!*" cried Coconnas, drawing his sword; "rouse yourself M. de la Mole."

"No, no; for whilst we rouse ourselves, our supper will get cold."

"What, you think——" cried Coconnas.

"That M. de la Belle Etoile is right; only he does not know how to treat his guests, especially when they are gentlemen; for instead of saying, 'Gentlemen I do not want you,' he should have said, 'Enter, gentlemen'—at the same time reserving to himself the right to charge in his bill—Master's room, so much; servants, so much."—With these words, La Mole pushed the host, who was looking for his arquebuss, on one side, and entered with Coconnas.

"Well," said Coconnas, "I am sorry to sheathe my sword before I have ascertained that it is as sharp as that rascal's larding-needle."

"Patience, my dear friend," said La Mole. "All the inns in Paris are full of gentlemen come to attend the King of Navarre's marriage, and we shall have great difficulty in finding another apartment; besides, perhaps it is the custom to receive strangers at Paris in this manner."

Mordi! how quiet you are, M. de la Mole!" muttered Coconnas, curling his red mustache with rage. "But let the scoundrel take care; for if his meat be not excellent, if his bed be hard, his wine less than three years in bottle, and his waiter be not as pliant as a reed——"

"Ah, ah!" said the landlord, whetting his knife on a strap, "you may make yourself easy; you are in a land of plenty."

Then, in a low tone, he added—"These are some Huguenots; they have grown so insolent since the marriage of their Béarnais with Mademoiselle Marguerite!" Then, with a smile that would have made his guests shudder had they seen it:

"How strange it would be if I were just to have two Huguenots come to my house, when——"

"Now, then," interrupted Coconnas, "are we going to have any supper?"

"Yes, as soon as you please, monsieur," returned the host, softened, no doubt, by the last reflection.

"Well, then, the sooner the better," said Coconnas; and turning to La Mole:

"Pray, M. le comte, whilst our room is being prepared tell me, do you think Paris seems a gay city?"

"*Ma foi!* no," said La Mole. "All the Parisians I saw had most forbidding faces; perhaps they are afraid of the storm; for the sky looks very black, and the air feels heavy."

"Are you not looking for the Louvre, count?"

"Yes! and you also, Monsieur de Coconnas."

"Well, let us look for it together."

"It is rather late to go out, is it not?" said La Mole.

"Early or late, I must go out: my orders are peremptory—'Come instantly to Paris, and communicate with the Duke de Guise without delay.'"

At the name of the Duke de Guise, the landlord drew nearer.

"I think the rascal is listening to us," said Coconnas, who could not forgive the host his rude reception of them.

"I am listening, gentlemen," replied he, taking off his cap; "but it is to serve you. I heard the great duke's name mentioned, and I came immediately. What can I do for you?"

"Ah! this name is magical, since it renders you so polite. Tell me, master—what's your name?"

"La Hurière," replied the host, bowing.

"Well, Master la Hurière do you think my arm is lighter than the Duc de Guise's, who makes you so civil?"

"No, M. le comte; but it is not so long; besides, I must tell you, that the great Henry is the idol of the Parisians."

"What Henry?" asked La Mole.

"There is only one."

"Which ?"

"Henry de Guise !"

"You are mistaken ; there is another, whom I desire you do not speak ill of, and that is Henry of Navarre, besides Henry de Condé, who has his share of merit."

"I do not know them," said the landlord.

"But I do ; and as I am directed to the King of Navarre, I desire you not to speak slightingly of him before me."

The host only replied by touching his cap, and continued speaking to Coconnas :

"Monsieur is going to see the great Duke de Guise. Monsieur is very fortunate. He is come, no doubt, for——"

"What ?" asked Coconnas.

"For the fête," replied the host, with a singular smile.

"For all the fêtes," replied Coconnas ; "for Paris is, I hear, a succession of fêtes. Does not every one find plenty of amusement ?"

"Pretty well ; but they will have more soon, I hope."

"The marriage of the King of Navarre has brought a great many people to Paris, has it not ?" said La Mole.

"A great many Huguenots—yes," replied La Hurière, but suddenly changing his tone :

"Pardon me, gentlemen," said he ; "perhaps you are of that religion ?"

"I," cried Coconnas, "I am as good a Catholic as the pope himself."

La Hurière looked at La Mole, but La Mole did not, or would not comprehend him.

"If you do not know the King of Navarre," said La Mole, "perhaps you know the admiral. I have heard he has some influence at court, and as I have letters for him, perhaps you will so far sully your mouth as to tell me where he lives ?"

"He *did* live in the Rue de Bethisy," replied the host, with a satisfaction he could not conceal.

"He *did* live ?" said La Mole. "He has left, then ?"

"Yes—this world, perhaps."

"What!" cried both the gentlemen together, "the admiral dead?"

"What, M. de Coconnas, are you a friend of the Duke de Guise, and not know *that?*"

"Know what?"

"That the day before yesterday the admiral was passing before the house of the Canon Pierre Piles, when he was fired at——"

"And killed?" said La Mole.

"No; he had his arm broken and two fingers taken off; but it is hoped the balls were poisoned."

"How, wretch!" cried La Mole; "hoped?"

"Believed, I mean," said the host, winking at Coconnas; "it was a slip of the tongue."

"Really!" said Coconnas, joyfully.

"Really!" said La Mole, sorrowfully.

"It is just as I tell you, gentlemen," said the host.

"In that case," said La Mole, "I must go instantly to the Louvre. Shall I find the King of Navarre there?"

"Most likely, since he lives there."

"And I," said Coconnas, "must also go to the Louvre. Shall I find the Duke de Guise there?"

"Most likely; for he has this instant passed with two hundred gentlemen."

"Come, then, M. de Coconnas," said La Mole.

"I am ready," returned he.

"But your supper, gentlemen!" cried La Hurière.

"Ah," said La Mole, "I shall most likely sup with the King of Navarre."

"And I," said Coconnas, "with the Duke de Guise."

"And I," said the host, after having watched the two gentlemen take the road to the Louvre, "I will go and burnish my steel cap, put a match to my arquebuss, and sharpen my partisan, for no one knows what may happen."

CHAPTER V.

OF THE LOUVRE IN PARTICULAR, AND OF VIRTUE IN GENERAL.

THE two young men, directed by the first person they met, went down the Rue d'Averon, the Rue St. Germain-l'Auxerrois, and soon found themselves before the Louvre, whose towers were beginning to be lost in the darkness of the night.

"What is the matter with you?" asked Coconnas of La Mole, who stopped before the old château, and gazed, not without awe, on the drawbridges, the narrow windows, and the pointed belfries, presented to him.

"I scarcely know," said La Mole; "my heart beats strangely. I am not timid, but this old palace seems so gloomy and terrible."

"For my part," replied Coconnas, "I feel in excellent spirits. My dress is rather disordered," continued he, "but never mind; it will prove I have obeyed my instructions, and come promptly on my arrival."

The two young men continued their way, each influenced by the feelings he had expressed.

The Louvre was guarded with more than usual care, and all the sentinels were doubled. Our cavaliers were somewhat embarrassed, therefore, but Coconnas, who had remarked that the Duke de Guise's name acted like a talisman on the Parisians, approached the sentinel, and making use of the duke's name, demanded to enter. The name seemed to produce its ordinary effect upon the soldier, who, however, asked Coconnas if he had the countersign.

Coconnas was forced to confess he had not.

"Stand back, then," said the soldier.

At this moment, a person who was talking with the officer of the guard when Coconnas demanded leave to enter, advanced to him.

"What do you want with M. de Guise?" asked he, with a strong German accent.

"I wish to see him," said Coconnas.

"Impossible—the duke is with the king."

"But I have a letter for him."

"Ah, that is different. What is your name?"

"The Count Annibal de Coconnas."

"Will Monsieur Annibal give me the letter?"

"On my word," said La Mole to himself, "I hope I may find another gentleman, equally polite, to conduct me to the King of Navarre."

"Give me the letter," said the German gentleman, holding out his hand towards Coconnas.

"*Mordi!*" replied the Piedmontese, "I scarcely know whether I ought, as I have not the honor of knowing you."

"It is Monsieur de Besme," said the sentinel, "you may safely give him your letter, I'll answer for it."

"M. de Besme!" cried Coconnas; "with the greatest pleasure. Here is the letter. Pardon my hesitation; but when one is entrusted with an important commission, one ought to be careful."

"There is no need of any excuse," said De Besme.

"Perhaps, sir," said La Mole, "you will be so kind as to do the same for my letter that you have done for that of my friend?"

"Who are you, monsieur?"

"The Count Lerac de la Mole."

"I don't know the name."

"No doubt; for I am only just arrived in Paris, for the first time."

"Where do you come from?"

"From Provence."

"With a letter also?"

"Yes."

"For the Duke de Guise?"

"No: for the King of Navarre."

"I am not in the service of the King of Navarre," said De Besme, coldly, "and therefore I cannot take your letter."

And turning on his heel, he entered the Louvre, bidding Coconnas follow him.

La Mole was left alone.

At this moment a troop of cavaliers, about a hundred in number, came out from the Louvre.

"Ah, ah!" said the sentinel to his comrade, "here come De Mouy and his Huguenots! See how joyous they all are. The king has promised them, no doubt, to put to death the assassin of the admiral; and as it was he who murdered De Mouy's father, the son will kill two birds with one stone."

"Did you not say," interrupted La Mole, "that this officer is M. de Mouy?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Thank you," said La Mole. "That was all I wished to know;" and advancing to the chief of the cavaliers.

"Sir," said he, "I am told you are M. de Mouy."

"Yes, sir," returned the officer, courteously. "May I inquire whom I have the honor of addressing?"

"The Count Lerac de la Mole."

The young men bowed to each other.

"What can I do for you, monsieur?" asked De Mouy.

"Monsieur, I am just arrived from Aix, and I have a letter from M. d'Aunac, governor of Provence, for the King of Navarre. How can I give it to him? How can I enter the Louvre?"

"Nothing is easier than to enter the Louvre," replied De Mouy; "but I fear the king will be unable to see you at this hour. I will, however, if you please, conduct you to his apartments, and then you must manage for yourself."

"A thousand thanks!"

"Come then," said De Mouy.

De Mouy dismounted, advanced towards the wicket, passed the sentinel, conducted La Mole into the château, and, opening the door leading to the king's apartments:

"Enter, and inquire for yourself, monsieur," said he.

And saluting La Mole, he retired.

La Mole, left alone, looked round. The anteroom was vacant. He advanced a few paces and found himself in a passage.

"I will walk straight on," thought he, "and I must meet some one."

Suddenly the door opposite that by which he had entered opened, and two pages appeared, lighting a lady of noble bearing and exquisite beauty.

The glare of the torches fell full on La Mole, who stood motionless.

The lady stopped also.

"What do you want, sir?" said she, in a voice of exquisite sweetness.

"Oh, madame," said La Mole, "pardon me; I have just left M. de Mouy, who was so good as to conduct me here, and I wish to see the King of Navarre."

"The king is not here, sir; he is with his brother-in-law. But, in his absence, could you not say to the queen——"

"Oh, yes, madame," returned La Mole, "if I could obtain audience of her."

"You have it already, sir"

"What!" cried La Mole.

"I am the Queen of Navarre."

La Mole started with surprise.

"Speak, sir," said Marguerite, "but speak quickly, for the queen-mother is waiting for me."

"If the queen-mother waits for you, madame," said La Mole, "suffer me to leave you, for I am incapable of collecting my ideas, or of thinking of aught but admiration."

Marguerite advanced graciously towards the handsome young man, who, without knowing it, acted like a finished courtier.

"Recover yourself, sir," said she; "I will wait."

"Pardon me, madame," said La Mole, "that I did not salute you with the respect due to you, but——"

"You took me for one of my ladies?" said Marguerite, smiling.

"No; but for the shade of the beautiful Diana of Poictiers, who is said to haunt the Louvre."

"Come, sir," said Marguerite, "I see you will make your fortune at court; your letter was not needed, but still, give it me: I will take care the King of Navarre has it."

In an instant La Mole threw open his doublet, and drew from his breast a letter enveloped in silk. Marguerite took the letter, and glanced at the writing.

"Are you not M. de la Mole?" asked she.

"Yes, madame. Can I hope my name is not unknown to you?"

"I have heard my husband, and the Duc d'Alençon, my brother, speak of you. I know they expect you."

And she placed the letter in her corsage, glittering with gold and diamonds.

"Now, sir," said she, "descend to the gallery below, and wait until some one comes to you from the King of Navarre. One of my pages will show you the way."

And Marguerite disappeared, like a dream.

"Are you coming, sir?" cried the page who was to conduct La Mole to the lower gallery.

"Oh, yes—yes!" cried La Mole, joyfully; for, as the page led him the same way that Marguerite had gone by, he hoped to see her again.

As he descended the staircase, he perceived her below; and whether she heard his step, or by chance, she looked round, and La Mole saw her features a second time.

The page preceding La Mole descended a story lower, opened one door, then another, and stopping—"It is here you are to wait," said he.

La Mole entered the gallery, the door of which closed after him.

The gallery was vacant, with the exception of one gentleman, who was sauntering up and down, and seemed also waiting for some one.

It was so dark, that though not twenty paces apart, it was impossible for either to recognize the other's face.

La Mole drew nearer.

"By Heaven!" muttered he—"here is M. de Coconnas again!"

At the sound of footsteps, Coconnas turned, and recognized La Mole.

"*Mordi!*" cried he. "The devil take me, but here is M. de la Mole! What am I doing? Swearing in the king's palace. Well, never mind; the king does not much care where he swears.—Here we are at last, then, in the Louvre!"

"Yes: I suppose M. de Besme introduced you?"

"Oh, he is the most polite German I ever met with. Who brought you in?"

"M. de Mouy. I told you the Huguenots had some interest at court. Have you seen M. de Guise?"

"No—not yet. Have you obtained an audience of the King of Navarre?"

"No—but I soon shall. I was conducted here, and told to wait."

"Ah, you will see we shall be invited to some grand supper, and placed side by side. How singular! We seem inseparable. By the way, are you hungry?"

"No."

"And yet you seemed anxious to taste the good cheer of *La Belle Etoile.*"

At this moment the door communicating with the king's apartment opened, and M. de Besme entered.

He scrutinized both gentlemen, and then motioned Coconnas to follow him.

Coconnas waved his hand to La Mole.

De Besme traversed a gallery, opened a door, and stood at the head of a staircase.

He looked cautiously round, and,

"M. de Coconnas," said he "where are you staying?"

"At the *Belle Etoile*, Rue de l'Arbre-Sec."

"Ah, that is close by. Return to your hotel, and to-night——"

"Well, to-night?"

"Come here, with a white cross in your hat. The password is 'Guise.' Hush! not a word."

"What time am I to come?"

"When you hear the tocsin."

"Good—I shall be here," said Coconnas.

And, saluting De Besme, he betook himself to the hostelry of *La Belle Etoile.*

At this instant the door of the King of Navarre's apartment opened, and a page appeared.

"You are the Count de la Mole?" said he.

"That is my name."

"Where do you lodge?"

"At the *Belle Etoile.*"

"That is close to the Louvre. His majesty the King of Navarre has desired me to inform you that he cannot at present receive you: perhaps he may send for you to-night; but, at all events, come to the Louvre to-morrow."

"But the sentinel will refuse me admission."

"True: the countersign is 'Navarre;' that will secure your entrance."

"Thanks."

The first thing La Mole saw on entering the inn was Coconnas seated before a large omelette.

"Oh, oh!" cried Coconnas, laughing, "I see you have no more dined with the King of Navarre than I have supped with the Duke de Guise."

"*Ma foi!* no."

"Are you hungry now?"

"Yes, very."

"Well, then, sit down, and partake of my omelette."

"I see that fate makes us inseparable. Do you sleep here?"

"I don't know."

"More do I."

"Well, then, I know where I shall pass the night."

"Where?"

"Wherever you do; that is inevitable."

Thus saying, the two gentlemen fell to work on the omelet of Maître la Hurière."

CHAPTER VI.

THE DEBT PAID.

Now, if the reader is curious to know why M. de la Mole had not been received by the King of Navarre, why M. de Coconnas had not seen M. de Guise, and why both, instead of supping at the Louvre, on pheasants, partridges, and kid, supped at the hotel of the *Belle Etoile* on an omelette, he must kindly accompany us to the old palace of kings, and follow the queen, Marguerite of Navarre, of whom La Mole had lost sight at the entrance of the grand gallery.

Whilst Marguerite was descending this staircase, the duke, Henry de Guise, whom she had not seen since the night of her marriage, was in the king's closet. To this staircase, which Marguerite was descending, there was an outlet. To the closet in which M. de Guise was, there was a door, and this door and this outlet both led to a corridor, which corridor led to the apartments of the queen-mother Catherine de Medicis.

Catherine de Medicis was alone, seated near a table, with her elbow leaning on a Prayer-book half open, and her head leaning on a hand still remarkably beautiful—thanks to the cosmetics with which she was supplied by the Florentine, René, who united the double duty of perfumer and poisoner to the queen-mother.

The widow of Henry II. was clothed in mourning, which she had not thrown off since her husband's death. At this period she was about fifty-two or fifty-three years of age, and preserved a figure full of freshness and still of considerable beauty. Her, apartment like her costume, was all mourning. By her side was a small Italian greyhound, called Phœbé, a present from her son-in-law, Henry of Navarre.

Suddenly, and at a moment when the queen-mother appeared plunged in some thought which brought a smile to her lips, colored with carmine, a man opened the door, raised the tapestry, and showed his pale visage, saying, "All goes badly."

Catherine raised her head, and recognized the Duke de Guise.

"How 'all goes badly'?" she replied. "What mean you, Henry?"

"I mean that the king is more then ever taken with the accursed Huguenots; and if we await his leave to execute the great enterprise, we shall wait a very long time, and perhaps forever."

"What, then, has happened?" inquired Catherine, still preserving the tranquillity of countenance that was habitual to her, and yet to which when occasion served, she could give so different an expression.

"Why, just now, for the twentieth time, I opened the conversation with his majesty as to whether he would still permit all those bravadoes which the gentlemen of the Reformed religion indulge in, since the wound of their admiral."

"And what did my son reply?" asked Catherine.

"He replied, 'Monsieur le Duc, you must necessarily be suspected by the people as the author of the attempted assassination of my second father, the admiral; defend yourself from the imputation as best you may. As to me, I will defend myself properly, if I am insulted; and then he turned away to feed his dogs."

"And you made no attempt to retain him!"

"Yes; but he replied to me, in that tone which you so well know, and looking at me with the gaze peculiar to him, 'M. le Duc, my dogs are hungry; and they are not men, whom I can keep waiting.' Whereupon I came straight to you."

"And you have done right," said the queen-mother.

"But what is now to be done?"

"Try a last effort."

"And who will try it?"

"I! Is the king alone?"

"No; M. de Tavannes is with him."

"Await me here; or, rather, follow me at a distance."

Catherine rose and went to the chamber, where, on Turkey carpets and velvet cushions, were the favorite greyhounds of the king. On perches ranged along the wall were two or three favorite falcons and a small pied hawk, with which Charles IX. amused himself in bringing down the small birds in the gården of the old Louvre, and that of the Tuileries, which they had just commenced building.

On her way the queen-mother arranged her countenance into a pale and agonizing look, down which rolled a last—or rather a first tear.

She approached Charles IX. noiselessly, as he was giving his dogs fragments of cakes cut into equal portions.

"My son," said the queen, with such a tremulous voice, so adroitly managed, that the king started.

"What would you, madame!" said Charles, turning round suddenly.

"I would, my son," replied Catherine, "request your leave to retire to one of your châteaux, no matter which, so that it be as distant as possible from Paris."

"And wherefore, madame?" inquired Charles IX., fixing on his mother that glassy eye, which, on certain occasions, became so penetrating.

"Because every day I receive new insults from persons of the new faith; because to-day I hear that you have been freshly menaced by the Protestants, even in your own Louvre, and I do not desire to be present at such spectacles."

"But, then, madame," replied Charles IX. with an expression full of conviction, "they have attempted to kill their admiral. An infamous murderer has already assassinated the brave M. de Mouy. *Mort de ma vie!* mother, there must be justice in a kingdom!"

"Oh, be easy on that head, my son," said Catherine; "justice will not be wanting to them; for if you should refuse it, they will still have it in their own way: on

M. de Guise to-day, on me to-morrow, and yourself hereafter."

"Oh, madame!" said Charles, allowing a first accent of doubt to break through, "do you think so?"

"Oh, my son," replied Catherine, giving way entirely to the violence of her thoughts, "do you not see that it is no longer a question of the death of François de Guise or the admiral, of Protestant religion or Catholic, but simply of the substitution of the son of Antoine de Bourbon for the son of Henry the Second?"

"Come, come, mother, you are falling again into your usual exaggeration," said the king.

"What is, then, your opinion, my son?"

"To wait, mother—to wait. All human wisdom is in this single word. The greatest, the strongest, the most skilful, is he who knows how to wait."

"Do you wait, then: I will not."

And on this Catherine made a curtsey, and, advancing towards the door, was about to return to her apartment.

Charles IX. stopped her.

"Well, then, really, what is best to be done, mother?" he asked, "for I am just, before everything, and I would have every one satisfied with me."

Catherine turned towards him.

"Come, count," she said to Tavannes, who was caressing the pied hawk, "and tell the king your opinion as to what should be done."

"Will your majesty permit me?" inquired the count.

"Speak, Tavannes!—speak."

"What does your majesty do when, in the chase, the wounded boar turns on you?"

"*Mordieu*, sir, I await him, with firm foot and hand," replied Charles, "and stab him in the throat with my good sword."

"Simply, that he may not hurt you," remarked Catherine.

"And to amuse myself," said the king, with a smile which indicated courage pushed even to ferocity; "but I will not amuse myself with killing my subjects; for, after all, the Huguenots are my subjects, as well as the Catholics."

"Then, sire," said Catherine, "your subjects, the Huguenots, will do like the wild boar who escapes the sword thrust at his throat: they will bring down the throne."

"Bah! Do you really think so, madame?" said Charles IX., with an air which denoted that he did not place great faith in his mother's predictions.

"But have you not seen M. de Mouy and his party to-day?"

"Yes; I have seen them, and indeed just left them. But what does he ask for that is not just? He has requested the death of the murderer of his father and the assassin of the admiral. Did we not punish M. de Montgomery for the death of my father and your husband, although that death was a simple accident?"

"'Tis well, sir," said Catherine, piqued; "let us say no more. Your majesty is under the protection of that God who gives strength, wisdom, and confidence. But I, a poor woman, whom God abandons, no doubt, on account of my sins, fear, and give way." And Catherine again curtseyed and left the room, making a sign to the Duke de Guise, who had at that moment entered, to remain in her place, and try a last effort.

Charles IX. followed his mother with his eye, but this time did not recall her. He then began to caress his dogs, whistling a hunting air.

He suddenly paused.

"My mother," said he, "is a right royal spirit, and doubts of nothing. Really, now, it is a cool proposal, to kill off some dozens of Huguenots, because they come to demand justice, as if it were not their right!"

"Some dozens!" murmured the Duke de Guise.

"Ah! are you there, sir?" said the king, appearing to see him for the first time. "Yes, some dozens. A tolerable waste of life! Ah! if any one came to me and said: 'Sire, you shall be rid of all your enemies at once, and to-morrow there shall not remain one to reproach you with the death of the others,' why, then, I do not say——"

"Well, sire!"

"Tavannes," said the king, "you will tire Margot; put her back on her perch. It is no reason, because she bears the name of my sister, the Queen of Navarre, that all the world should caress her."

Tavannes put the hawk on her perch, and amused himself by playing with a greyhound's ears.

"But, sire, if any one should say to your majesty: 'Sire, your majesty shall be delivered from all your enemies to-morrow'?"

"And by the intercession of what saint would this great miracle be effected?"

"Sire, we are to-day at the 24th of August, and it will therefore be by the interposition of Saint Bartholomew."

"A worthy saint," replied the king, "who allowed himself to be skinned alive!"

"So much the better; the more he suffered, the more he ought to have felt a desire for vengeance on his executioners."

"And is it you, my cousin," said the king, "is it you, with your pretty little gold-hilted sword, who will to-morrow slay ten thousand Huguenots? Ah, ah! *mort de ma vie!* you are very amusing, M. De Guise?" And the king burst into loud laughter, but a laughter so forced that the room echoed with its sinister sound.

"Sire, one word—and one only," continued the duke, shuddering in spite of himself at the sound of this laugh, which had nothing human in it—"one sign, and all is ready. I have the Swiss and eleven hundred gentlemen; I have the light horse and the citizens on my side; your majesty has your guards; your friends, the Catholic nobility. We are twenty to one."

"Well, then, cousin of mine, since you are so strong, why the devil do you come to fill my ears with all this! Act without me—act——"

And the king turned again to his dogs.

Then the tapestry suddenly moved aside, and Catherine reappeared.

"All goes well," she said to the duke; "urge him, and he will yield."

And the tapestry fell on Catherine without the king seeing, or at least appearing to see her.

"But yet," continued De Guise, "it is necessary I should know, if, in acting as I desire, I shall act agreeably to your majesty's views."

"Really, cousin Henry, you put your knife to my throat! But I shall resist. *Mordieu!* am I not the king?"

"No, not yet, sire; but, if you will, you shall be so tomorrow."

"Ah—what!" continued Charles, "you would kill the King of Navarre, the Prince de Condé, in my Louvre—ah!" Then he added, in a voice scarcely audible—"Without the walls, I do not say——"

"Sire," cried the duke, "they are going out this evening, to join in a revel with your brother, the Duke d'Alençon."

"Tavannes," said the king, with well-affected impatience, "do not you see that you annoy Actæon? Here boy—here!"

And Charles IX. quitted the apartment, without waiting to hear more, and leaving Tavannes and the Duke de Guise almost as uncertain as before.

Another scene was passing in Catherine's apartments, who, after she had given the Duke de Guise her counsel to remain firm, had returned to her rooms, where she found assembled the persons who usually assisted at her going to bed.

Her face was now as full of joy as it had been downcast when she set out. One by one she dismissed her women, and there only remained Madame Marguerite, who, seated on a coffer near the open window, was looking at the sky, absorbed in thought.

Two or three times, when she thus found herself alone with her daughter, the queen-mother opened her mouth to speak, but each time a gloomy thought withheld the words ready to escape her lips.

Suddenly the tapestry moved, and Henry of Navarre appeared.

The little greyhound, which was asleep on a sofa, leaped towards him at a bound.

"You here, my son!" said Catherine, starting. "Do you sup in the Louvre to-night?"

"No, madame," replied Henry, "we are going into the city to-night, with Messieurs d'Alençon and De Condé. I almost expected to find them here."

Catherine smiled.

"Ah! you men are so happy to have such liberty! Are they not, dear daughter?"

"Yes," replied Marguerite, "liberty is so glorious, so sweet a thing."

"Would you imply that I restricted you, madame?" inquired Henry, bowing to his wife.

"No, sir; it is not for myself that I complain, but for women in general."

"Who goes there?" asked Catherine, suddenly, and at the same moment the tapestry was raised, and Madame de Sauve showed her lovely head.

"Madame," she said, "it is René, the perfumer, whom your majesty sent for."

Catherine cast a glance as quick as lightning at Henry of Navarre. The young prince turned slightly red, and then fearfully pale. The name of his mother's assassin had been mentioned in his presence; he felt that his face betrayed his emotion, and he leaned against the bar of the window.

The little greyhound growled.

At the same moment, two persons entered; the one announced, and the other having no need to be so.

The first was René, the perfumer, who approached Catherine with all the servile obsequiousness of Florentine servants. He held in his hand a box, which he opened, and all the compartments were seen filled with powders and flasks.

The second was Madame de Lorraine, the eldest sister of Marguerite. She entered by a small private door, which led from the King's closet, and, all pale and trembling, and hoping not to be observed by Catherine, who was examining, with Madame de Sauve, the contents of the box brought by René, seated herself beside Marguerite, near whom the King of Navarre was standing, with his hand on his brow, like one who tries to rouse himself from some sudden shock.

At this instant Catherine turned round.

"Daughter," she said to Marguerite, "you may retire to your chamber. My son, you may go and recreate yourself in the city."

Marguerite rose, and Henry turned half round.

Madame de Lorraine seized Marguerite's hand.

"Sister," she whispered, with great quickness, "in the name of the Duke de Guise, who now saves you, as you saved him, do not go hence—do not go to your apartments."

"Eh ! what say you, Claude ?" inquired Catherine, turning round.

"Nothing, mother."

"What did you whisper to Marguerite ?"

"Only a message from the Duchess de Nevers."

"And where is the lovely duchess ?"

"With her brother-in-law, M. de Guise."

Catherine looked suspiciously at her two daughters, and frowned.

"Come here, Claude," said the queen-mother.

Claude obeyed, and the queen seized her hand.

"What have you said to her, indiscreet girl that you are ?" she murmured, squeezing her daughter's wrist until she nearly shrieked with pain.

"Madame," said Henry to his wife, he having lost nothing of the movements of the queen, Claude, or Marguerite—"Madame, will you allow me the honor of kissing your hand ?"

Marguerite extended her trembling hand.

"What did she say to you ?" murmured Henry, as he stooped to imprint a kiss on her hand.

"Not to go out. In the name of Heaven, therefore, do not you go out either !"

This was but a slight gleam ; but by its light, rapid as it was, Henry at once saw through the whole plot.

"This is not all," added Marguerite; "here is a letter, which a country gentleman brought."

"M. de la Mole?"

"Yes."

"Thanks," he said, taking the letter, and putting it under his doublet; and passing in front of his bewildered wife, he placed his hand on the shoulder of the Florentine.

"Well, Master René!" he said, "and how goes on business?"

"Pretty well, monseigneur—pretty well," replied the poisoner, with his perfidious smile.

"I should think so," said Henry, "with men who, like you, supply all the crowned heads at home and abroad."

"Except the King of Navarre," replied the Florentine, impudently.

"*Ventre-saint-gris*, Master René," replied the king, "you are right; and yet my poor mother, who also bought of you, recommended you to me with her dying breath. Come to me to-morrow, or the day after to-morrow, and bring your best perfumes."

At this moment, the Duchess of Lorraine, who could no longer contain herself, burst into loud sobs.

Henry did not even turn towards her.

"Sister, dear, what is the matter?" cried Marguerite, going towards her.

"Nothing," said Catherine, passing between the two young women—"nothing; she has those nervous attacks, for which Mazille prescribed aromatic preparations;" and again, and with more force than before, she pressed her eldest daughter's arm; then, turning towards the youngest:

"Why, Margot," she said, "did you hear me request you to retire to your room? if that is not sufficient, I command you."

"Excuse me madame," replied Marguerite, trembling and pale; "I wish your majesty good night."

"I hope your wishes may be heard. Good night—good night!"

Marguerite withdrew, staggering with affright, and in vain seeking a glance from her husband, who did not even turn towards her.

There was a moment's silence, during which Catherine remained with her eyes fastened on the Duchess of Lorraine, who, on her side, without speaking, looked at her mother with clasped hands.

Henry's back was still turned, but he was watching the scene in a glass, whilst seeming to curl his mustache with a pomade which René had given to him.

"And you, Henry, do you mean to go?" asked Catherine.

"Yes, that's true," exclaimed the king. "*Ma foi!* I forgot that the Duke d'Alençon and the Prince de Condé were awaiting me! These are admirable perfumes; they quite overpower one, and destroy one's memory. Good evening, madame."

"Good evening! To-morrow you will perhaps bring me tidings of the admiral."

"Without fail.—Well, Phœbé, what is it?"

"Phœbé!" said the queen-mother, impatiently.

"Call her, madame," said the Béarnais, "for she will not allow me to go out."

The queen-mother rose, took the little greyhound by the collar, and held her whilst Henry left the apartment, with his features as calm and smiling as if he did not feel in his heart that his life was in imminent peril.

Behind him the little dog, set free by Catherine de Medicis, rushed to try and overtake him, but the door was closed, and Phœbé could only put her long nose under the tapestry and give a long and mournful howl.

"Now, Charlotte," said Catherine to Madame de Sauve, "go and find M. de Guise and Tavannes, who are in my oratory, and return with them, and remain with the Duchess of Lorraine, who has the vapors."

CHAPTER VII.

THE NIGHT OF THE 24TH OF AUGUST, 1572.

WHEN La Mole and Coconnas had finished their meager supper, Coconnas stretched his legs, leaned one elbow on the table, and drinking a last glass of wine, said :

"Do you mean to go to bed instantly, Monsieur de la Mole ?"

"*Ma foi!* I am very much inclined, for it is possible that I may be called up in the night."

"And I, too," said Coconnas ; "but it appears to me that, under the circumstances, instead of going to bed and making those wait who are to come to us, we should do better to call for cards and play a game. They will then find us quite ready."

"I would willingly accept your proposal, sir, but I have very little money for play. I have scarce a hundred gold crowns in my valise, for my whole treasure."

"A hundred gold crowns !" cried Coconnas, "and you complain ? *Mordi!* I have but six !"

"Why," replied La Mole, "I saw you draw from your pocket a purse which appeared not only full, but I should say, brimful."

"Ah," said Coconnas, "that is to defray an old debt which I am compelled to pay to an old friend of my father, whom I suspect to be like yourself, somewhat of a Huguenot. Yes, there are here a hundred rose nobles," he added, slapping his pocket, "but these hundred rose nobles belong to a Master Mercandon. As to my personal patrimony, that, as I tell you, is limited to six crowns."

"How, then, can you play ?"

"Why, it is because of that I wish to play. Besides, an idea occurs to me."

"What is it ?"

"We both came to Paris on the same errand."

"Yes."

"We have each sought a powerful protector."

"Yes."

"You rely on yours, as I rely on mine."

"Yes."

"Well, then, it occurred to me that we should play at first for our money, and afterwards for the first favor which came to us, either from the court or from our mistress."

"Really, a very ingenious idea," said La Mole, with a smile, "but I confess I am not such a gamester as to risk my whole life on a card or a turn of the dice; for the first favor which may come either to you or to me will, in all probability, involve our whole life. But, if you will, let us play until your six crowns be lost or doubled, and if lost, and you desire to continue the game, you are a gentleman, and your word is as good as gold."

"Done," replied Coconnas; "a gentleman's word is gold, especially when he has credit at court. Thus, believe me, I did not risk too much when I proposed to play for the first favor we might receive at court."

"Doubtless, and you might lose it, but I could not gain it; for, being with the King of Navarre, I could not receive anything from the Duke de Guise."

"Ah, the heretic!" murmured the host, whilst rubbing up his old casque—"what! I smelt you out, did I!" and he crossed himself devoutly.

"Well, then," continued Coconnas, shuffling the cards which the waiter brought him, "you are of the——"

"What?"

"New religion."

"I?"

"Yes, you."

"Well, say that I am," said La Mole, with a smile, "have you anything against us?"

"No, thank God!—I hate Huguenotry with all my heart, but I do not hate the Huguenots, for they are in fashion just now."

"Yes," replied La Mole, smiling; "to wit, the shooting at the admiral; but let us play."

"Yes, let us play, and fear not, for should I lose a hundred crowns of gold against yours, I shall have wherewithal to pay you to-morrow morning."

"Then your fortune will come whilst you sleep."

"No; I shall go and find it."

"Where? I'll go with you."

"At the Louvre."

"Are you going back there to-night?"

"Yes; I have, to-night, a private audience with the great Duke de Guise."

Since Coconnas had mentioned the Louvre, La Hurière had left off cleaning his headpiece, and placed himself behind La Mole's chair, so that Coconnas alone could see him, and made signs to him, with the Piedmontese, absorbed in his game and the conversation, did not remark.

"Well, it is very strange," remarked La Mole; "and you were right to say that we were born under the same star. I have also an appointment at the Louvre to-night, but not with the Duke de Guise; mine is with the King of Navarre."

"Have you a countersign?"

"Yes."

"A rallying sign?"

"No."

"Well, I have one, and my countersign is——"

At these words of the Piedmontese, La Hurière made so significant a gesture, that Coconnas, who had just raised his head, was greatly astonished, even more than by the game, at which he had lost three crowns.

"What's the matter?" asked La Mole, but seeing nothing, he shuffled the cards again; whilst La Hurière retired, placing his finger on his lips to recommend discretion, and leaving Coconnas so amazed, that he again lost almost as rapidly the second time as the first.

"Well," observed La Mole, "this makes exactly your six crowns. Will you have your revenge on your future fortune?"

"Willingly," replied Coconnas.

"But before you begin, did you not say you had an appointment with the Duke de Guise?"

"Coconnas turned his looks towards the kitchen, and saw the great eyes of La Hurière.

"Yes," he replied, "but it is not yet the hour. But now let us talk a little about yourself, M. de la Mole."

"We shall do better, I think, by talking of the game, my dear M. de Coconnas; for unless I am very much mistaken, you are in a fair way of losing six more crowns."

"*Mordi!* and that is true! I always heard that the Huguenots had good luck at cards. Devil take me, if I haven't a good mind to turn Huguenot!"

"Do, count, do," said La Mole; "and you shall be well received amongst us."

Coconnas scratched his ear.

"If I were sure that your good luck came from that," he said, "I would; for I really do not hold so entirely with mass, and as the king does not think so much of it either——"

"Then it is such a simple religion," said La Mole; "so pure——"

"And, moreover, it is in fashion," said Coconnas; "and it brings good luck at cards; for, devil take me, if you do not hold all the aces, and yet I have watched you closely, and you play very fairly; it must be the religion——"

"You owe me six crowns more," said La Mole, quietly.

"Ah, how you tempt me!" said Coconnas.

"Hush!" said La Mole, "you will get into a quarrel with our host."

"Ah, that is true," said Coconnas, turning his eyes towards the kitchen; "but—no, he is not listening; he is too much occupied at this moment."

"What is he doing?" inquired La Mole, who could see nothing from his place.

"He is talking with—devil take me! it is he!"

"Who?"

"Why, that night-bird with whom he was discoursing when we arrived. The man in the yellow doublet and sad-colored cloak. *Mordi!* how earnestly he talks."

At this moment, La Hurière came hastily to Coconnas, and whispered in his ear: "Silence, for your life! and get rid of your companion."

Coconnas, turning to La Mole, said: "My dear sir, I must beg you to excuse me. I have lost fifty crowns in no time. I am in bad luck to-night."

"Well, sir, as you please," replied La Mole; "besides, I shall not be sorry to lie down for a time. Master la Hurière!"

"Sir."

"If any one comes for me from the King of Navarre, wake me immediately; I shall be dressed, and consequently ready."

"So shall I," said Coconnas; "and that I may not keep his highness waiting, I will prepare the sign. Master la Hurière, some white paper and scissors!"

"Good night, M. de Coconnas," said La Mole; "and you, landlord, be so good as to light me to my room. Good luck, my friend!" and La Mole disappeared up the staircase, followed by La Hurière.

Then the mysterious personage, taking Coconnas by the arm, said to him, with much quickness:

"Sir, you have very nearly betrayed a secret on which depends the fate of a kingdom. One word more, and I should have brought you down with my arquebuss. Now we are alone."

"But who are you?"

"Did you ever hear talk of Maurevel?"

"The assassin of the admiral?"

"And of Captain de Mouy."

"Yes."

"Well, I am De Maurevel."

"Ah, ah!" said Coconnas.

"Hush!" said Maurevel, putting his finger on his mouth.

Coconnas listened.

At this moment he heard the landlord close the door of a chamber, then the door of a corridor, and bolt it; and then return precipitately to Coconnas and Maurevel, offering each a seat, and taking a third for himself.

"All is close now," he said, "and you may speak out, M. Maurevel."

Eleven o'clock struck by Saint Germain l'Auxerrois; Maurevel counted each stroke of the clock, which sounded full and dull in the night, and, when the last sound had died away:

"Sir," he said, turning to Coconnas, who was amazed at all the precautions taken, "are you a good Catholic?"

"I believe so," replied Coconnas.

"Sir, are you devoted to the king?"

"Body and soul! you offend me, sir, by asking such a question."

"Will you follow us?"

"Whither?"

"That is of no consequence—let me guide you; your fortune, and perhaps your life, are concerned in the result."

"I tell you, sir, that at midnight I have an appointment at the Louvre."

"That is where we are going."

"M. de Guise awaits me there."

"And us also!"

"But I have a written pass-word."

"And so have we!"

"I have a sign of recognition."

Maurevel drew from beneath his doublet a handful of crosses in white stuff, gave one to La Hurière, one to Coconnas, and took another for himself. La Hurière fastened his to his helmet. Maurevel attached his to the side of his hat.

"Ah, then," said Coconnas, amazed, "the appointment, the countersign, and the rallying mark were for everybody?"

"Yes, sir—that is to say, for all good Catholics."

"Then there is a fête at the Louvre—some royal banquet, is there not?" said Coconnas; "and they wish to exclude those hounds of Huguenots,—good,—capital—excellent! They have had the best of it too long."

"Yes, there is a fête at the Louvre—a royal banquet; and the Huguenots are invited—and more, they will be the heroes of the fête, and will pay for the festival, and if you will be one of us, we will begin by going to invite their principal champion—their Gideon, as they call him."

"The admiral!" cried Coconnas.

"Yes, old Gaspard, whom I missed, like a fool, although I aimed at him with the king's arquebuss."

"And this, my gentleman, is why I was furbishing my helmet, sharpening my sword, and putting an edge on my knives," said La Hurière, with a loud and bear-like voice.

At these words, Coconnas shuddered and turned very pale, for he began to comprehend.

"Then really," he exclaimed, "this fête—this banquet is a——"

"You are a long time guessing, sir," said Maurevel, "and it is easy to see that you are not so weary of these insolent heretics as we are."

"And you take on yourself," he said, "to go to the admiral and to——"

Maurevel smiled, and drawing Coconnas to the window, he said:

"Look there!—do you see, in the small square at the end of the street, behind the church, a troop drawn up quietly in the shadow?"

"Yes."

"The men who form that troop have, like Master la Hurière, and myself, and yourself, a cross in their hats."

"Well!"

"Well, these men are a company of Swiss, from the smaller cantons, commanded by Toquenot—you know they are friends of the king."

"Ah, ah!" said Coconnas.

"Now, look at that troop of horse passing along the Quay—do you recognize their leader?"

"How can I recognize him," asked Coconnas, with a shudder, "when it was only this evening that I arrived in Paris?"

"Well, then, it is he with whom you have a rendezvous at the Louvre at midnight. See, he is going to wait for you!"

"The Duke de Guise?"

"Himself! His escorts are, Marcel, the ex-provost of the tradesmen, and Jean Chorou, the present provost. These two are going to summon their companies, and here comes the captain of the quarter. See what he will do?"

"He knocks at each door; but what is there on the doors at which he knocks?"

"A white cross, young man, such as that which we have in our hats."

"But at each house at which he knocks they open, and from each house there come out armed citizens."

"He will knock here in turn, and we shall in turn go out."

"But," said Coconnas, "if all the world is on foot to go and kill one old Huguenot—*Mordi!* it is shameful? It is an affair of cut-throats, and not of soldiers."

"Young man," replied Maurevel, "if the old are objectionable to you, you may choose young ones—you will find plenty for all tastes. If you despise daggers, use your sword, for the Huguenots are not the men to allow their throats to be cut without defending themselves, and you know that Huguenots, young or old, are hard-lived."

"But are they going to kill them all, then?" cried Coconnas.

"All!"

"By order of the king?"

"By order of the king and M. de Guise."

"And when?"

"When you hear the clock of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois strike."

"Oh, it was for that, then, that the amiable German told me to hasten at the first sound of the tocsin."

"You have, then, seen M. de Besme?"

"I have seen and spoken to him."

"Where?"

"At the Louvre."

"Look there!"

"*Mordi!*—'tis he himself."

"Would you speak with him?"

"Why, really, I should like to do so."

Maurevel opened the window instantly; Besme was passing at the moment with twenty soldiers.

"Guise and Lorraine!" said Maurevel.

Besme turned round, and perceiving that it was himself who was accosted, he came under the window.

"Oh, is it you, Sirè de Maurevel?"

"Yes, 'tis I, what seek you?"

"I am seeking the hostelry of the *Belle Etoile,* to find a Monsieur Coconnas."

"I am here, M. de Besme," said the young man.

"Good, good; are you ready?"

"Yes—to do what?"

"Whatever M. de Maurevel may tell you, for he is a good Catholic."

"Do you hear?" inquired Maurevel.

"Yes," replied Coconnas, "but M. de Besme!—where are you going?"

"I am going to say a word to the admiral."

"Say two, if necessary," said Maurevel, "and this time, if he gets up again at the first, do not let him rise at the second."

"Make yourself easy, M. de Maurevel, and put the young gentleman in the right path."

"Ah, have no fear for me; the Coconnas have keen scent, and good bred dogs hunt from instinct."

"Adieu! begin the chase, for we are in the slot of the deer."

De Besme went on, and Maurevel closed the window.

"You hear, young man," said Maurevel, "if you have any private enemy, although he is not altogether a Huguenot, you can put him on your list, and he will pass with the others."

Coconnas, more bewildered than ever with what he saw and heard, looked about him, at the host and Maurevel, who quietly drew a paper from his pocket. "Here's my list," said he; "three hundred. Let each good Catholic do this night one-tenth part of the business I shall do, and to-morrow there will not remain one single heretic in the kingdom."

"Hush!" said La Hurière.

"What is it?" inquired Coconnas and Maurevel together.

They heard the first stroke of the bell of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois vibrate.

"The signal!" exclaimed Maurevel. "The time is put on—for it was agreed for midnight. So much the better. When it is the interest of God and the king, it is better that the clock should be put forward than backward." And the sinister sound of the church bell was distinctly heard. Then a shot was fired, and in an instant, the light of several flambeaux blazed up like flashes of lightning in the Rue de l'Arbre-Sec.

Coconnas passed his hand over his brow, which was damp with perspiration.

"It has begun!" cried Maurevel. "Now to work—away!"

"One moment, one moment!" said the host. "Before we begin, let us make safe the house. I do not wish to have my wife and children killed in my absence. There is a Huguenot here."

"M. de la Mole!" said Coconnas, starting.

"Yes, the fowl has thrown himself into the wolf's throat."

"What!" said Coconnas; "would you attack your guest?"

"It was for him I gave an extra edge to my rapier."

"Oh, oh!" said the Piedmontese, frowning.

"I never yet killed anything but rabbits, ducks, and chickens," replied the worthy host, "and I do not know very well how to kill a man; but I can make my first trial on him, and if I am clumsy, no one will be there to laugh at me."

"*Mordi*." it is hard," said Coconnas. "M. de la Mole is my companion; M. de la Mole has supped with me; M. de la Mole has played with me."

"Yes; but M. de la Mole is a heretic," said Maurevel. "M. de la Mole is doomed; and if we do not kill him, others will."

"Not to say," added the host, "that he has gained fifty crowns from you."

"True," said Coconnas; "but, fairly, I am sure."

Fairly, or not, you must pay them, whilst, if I kill him, you are quits."

"Come come!" cried Maurevel; "make haste, or we shall not be in time with the aid we have promised M. de Guise, at the admiral's."

"Coconnas sighed.

"I'll make haste!" cried La Hurière, "wait for me."

"*Mordi!*" cried Coconnas, "he will put the poor gentleman to great pain, and, perhaps, rob him. I must be present to finish him, if requisite, and to prevent him from touching his money."

And impelled by this happy thought, Coconnas followed La Hurière up-stairs, and soon overtook him, for the latter slackened his pace when he approached the intended victim.

As he reached the door, Coconnas still following, several discharges of musquetry in the streets were heard.

"*Diable!*" muttered La Hurière, somewhat disconcerted; "that has awakened him, I think."

"I should say so," observed Coconnas, "and he will defend himself; I do not know a likelier man. Suppose, now, Master la Hurière, he were to kill you, that would be droll, eh?"

"Hum, hum!" responded the host, but knowing himself to be armed with a good arquebuss, he dashed the door in with a kick of his foot.

La Mole, without his hat, but dressed, was entrenched behind his bed, his sword between his teeth, and his pistols in his hands.

"Ah, ah!" said Coconnas, his nostrils expanding like a wild beast who smelt blood—"this grows interesting, Master la Hurière.—Forward!"

"Ah, you would assassinate me, it seems!" cried La Mole, whose eyes glared; "and it is you, wretch!"

Master la Hurière's reply to this was to take aim at the young man with his arquebuss; but La Mole was on his guard, and as he fired, went on his knees, and the ball passed over his head.

"Help!" cried La Mole; "help, M. de Coconnas!"

"Help, M. de Maurevel!—help!" cried La Hurière.

"*Ma foi!* M. de la Mole," replied Coconnas, "all I can do in this affair is not to join the attack against you. It seems, all the Huguenots are to be put to death to-night, in the king's name. Get out of it as well as you can."

"Ah, traitors! assassins!—is it so? Well, then, take this!" And La Mole, aiming in his turn, fired one of his pistols. La Hurière, who had kept his eye on him, moved suddenly on one side; but Coconnas, not anticipating such a reply, had not stirred, and the ball grazed his shoulder.

"*Mordi!*" he exclaimed, grinding his teeth—"I have it. Well, then, let it be us two, since you will have it so!"—and drawing his rapier, he rushed on La Mole.

Had he been alone, La Mole would, doubtless, have awaited his attack; but Coconnas had La Hurière to aid him, who was reloading his gun, and Maurevel, who was coming rapidly up the stairs. La Mole, therefore, dashed into a small closet, which he bolted inside.

"Ah, coward!" cried Coconnas, furious, and striking at the door with the pommel of his sword—"wait! wait! and I will make as many holes in your body as you have gained crowns of me to-night. Wait for me, poltroon—wait for me!"

La Hurière fired his arquebuss at the lock, and the door flew open.

Coconnas rushed into the closet, but it was empty, and the window open.

"He has thrown himself out," said the host, "and as we are on the fourth story, he must be killed."

"Or, he has escaped by the roof of the next house," said Coconnas, putting his leg over the bar of the window, and preparing to follow him over this narrow and slippery route; but Maurevel and La Hurière drew him back into the apartment.

"Are you mad?" they both exclaimed at once; "you will kill yourself!"

"Bah!" said Coconnas, "I am a mountaineer, and used to traverse the glaciers; besides, when a man has once offended me, I will go up to heaven or descend to hell with him, by whatever route he pleases. Let me do as I wish."

"Well," said Maurevel, "he is either dead or a long way off by this time. Come with us; and if he escape you, there will be a thousand others in his place."

"You are right," cried Coconnas. "Death to the Huguenots! I want revenge, and the sooner the better."

And the three descended the staircase, like an avalanche.

"To the admiral's!" shouted Maurevel.

"To the admiral's!" shouted La Hurière.

"To the admiral's, then, if it must be so!" shouted Coconnas.

And all three, leaving the *Belle Etoile* in charge of Gregoire and the other waiters, hastened towards the Rue de Béthisy, a bright light, and the report of fire-arms, guiding them in that direction.

"Who comes here?" cried Coconnas. "A man without his doublet or scarf!"

"It is some one escaping," said Maurevel.

"Fire! fire!" said Coconnas; "you who have arquebusses."

"*Ma foi!* not I," replied Maurevel. "I keep my powder for better game."

"You, then, La Hurière!"

"Wait, wait!" said the innkeeper, taking aim.

"Oh, yes, wait, and he will escape," replied Coconnas. And he rushed after the unhappy wretch, whom he soon overtook, as he was wounded; but at the moment when, in order that he might not strike him behind, he exclaimed, "Turn, turn!" the report of an arquebuss was heard, a ball whistled by Coconnas' ears, and the fugitive rolled over, like a hare struck by the shot of the sportsman.

A cry of triumph was heard behind Coconnas. The Piedmontese turned round, and saw La Hurière brandishing his weapon.

"Ah, now," he exclaimed, "I have made my maiden shot!"

"And only just missed making a hole in me, from one side to the other."

"Be on your guard!—be on your guard!"

Coconnas sprung back. The wounded man had risen on his knee, and, full of revenge, was about to stab him with his poniard, when the host's warning put the Piedmontese on his guard.

"Ah, viper!" shouted Coconnas; and rushing at the wounded man, he thrust his sword through him three times up to the hilt.

"And now," cried he, leaving the Huguenot in the agonies of death—"to the admiral's!—to the admiral's!"

"Ah, ah! my gentlemen," said Maurevel, "it seems to work."

"*Ma foi!*" yes," replied Coconnas. "I do not know if it is the smell of gunpowder that makes me drunk, or the sight of blood which excites me, but *mordi!* I am all anxious for slaughter. It is like a battue of men. I have as yet only had battues of bears and wolves, and, on my honor, a battue of men seems more amusing." And the three went on their way.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE VICTIMS.

The hotel of the admiral was, as we have said, situated in the Rue de Béthisy. It was a large house, opening on a court in front, flanked by two wings. One principal and two small gates afforded entrance into this courtyard.

When our three cut-throats entered the Rue Béthisy, which forms part of the Rue des Fossés-St.-Germain-l'Auxerrois, they saw the hotel surrounded with Swiss soldiers and citizens, all armed to the teeth, some holding drawn swords, others arquebusses loaded and the matches burning, and some, in their left hand, torches that threw a fitful and lurid glare on this sea of human heads and naked weapons. The work of destruction was proceeding in the Rues Tirechappe, Etienne, and Bertin-Poirée. Agonized cries and the reports of muskets were heard incessantly; and, occasionally, some wretched fugitive rushed wildly through what, seen by the uncertain light, seemed a troop of demons.

In an instant, Coconnas, Maurevel, and La Hurière, accredited by their white crosses, and received with cries of welcome, were in the midst of the tumult, though they could not have entered the throng, had not Maurevel been recognized. Coconnas and La Hurière followed him, and all three contrived to enter the court.

In the center of this court, the three doors of which were burst open, a man, around whom a body of Catholics formed a respectful circle, stood leaning on his drawn rapier, and eagerly looking up at a balcony about fifteen feet above him, which extended in front of the principal window of the hotel.

This man stamped impatiently on the ground, and, from time to time, questioned those around him.

"Nothing yet!" murmured he. "No one! He has been warned, and has escaped. What do you think, Du Gast?"

"Impossible, monseigneur."

"Why? Did you not tell me, that just before we arrived, a man, bareheaded, a drawn sword in his hand, came running, as if pursued, knocked at the door, and was admitted?"

"Yes, monseigneur: but M. de Besme came up immediately, broke open the doors, and surrounded the hotel. The man went in, sure enough, but he has not gone out."

"Why," said Coconnas to La Hurière, "if my eyes do not deceive me, it is M. de Guise I see."

"Himself, monsieur. Yes; the great Henry de Guise is come in person to watch for the admiral and serve him as he served the duke's father. Every one has his day, and it is our turn now."

"Hola, Besme!" cried the duke, with his powerful voice, "have you not finished yet?"

And he struck his sword so forcibly against the stones that sparks flew out.

At this instant cries were heard in the hotel—then several shots—then a clashing of swords, and then all was again silent.

The duke was about to rush into the house.

"Monseigneur, monseigneur!" said Du Gast, detaining him, "your dignity commands you to wait here."

"You are right, Du Gast. I must stay here; but I am dying with anxiety. If he were to escape!"

Suddenly the windows of the first floor were lighted up with what seemed the reflection of torches.

The window, on which the duke's eyes were fixed, opened, or, rather, was shattered to pieces, and a man, his face and collar stained with blood, appeared on the balcony.

"Ah! at last, Besme!" cried the duke; "what news?"

"Here! here!" replied the German, with the greatest *sang froid*, lifting as he spoke, a heavy body.

"But where are the others?" demanded the duke.

"The others are finishing the rest."

"And what have *you* done ?"

"You shall see. Stand back a little !"

The duke retreated a few paces.

The object that Besme was trying to lift was now visible ; it was the body of an old man. He raised it above the balcony, and threw it, by a powerful effort, at his master's feet.

The heavy fall, and the blood that gushed forth, startled even the duke himself ; but curiosity soon overpowered fear, and the light of the torches was speedily thrown on the body.

A white beard, a venerable visage, and limbs contracted by death, were then visible. "The admiral !" cried twenty voices, as instantaneously hushed.

"Yes, the admiral !" said the duke approaching the corpse, and contemplating it with silent ecstasy.

"The admiral ! the admiral !" repeated the witnesses of this terrible scene, timidly approaching the old man, majestic even in death.

"Ah, at last, Gaspard !" said the Duke de Guise, triumphantly. "Murderer of my father ! thus do I avenge him !"

And the duke dared to plant his foot on the breast of the Protestant hero. But instantly the dying warrior opened his eyes, his bleeding and mutilated hand clenched itself, and the admiral, with a sepulchral voice, said to the duke :

"Henry de Guise, one day the foot of the assassin shall be planted on thy breast ! I did not kill thy father, and I curse thee !"

The duke, pale, and trembling in spite of himself, felt a cold shudder come over him. He passed his hand across his brow, as if to dispel the fearful vision ; and when he dared again to glance at the admiral, his eyes were closed, his hand unclenched, and a stream of black blood poured over his silvery beard from that mouth which had so lately uttered the terrible denunciation against his murderer.

The duke lifted his sword with a gesture of desperate resolution.

"Are you satisfied, monseigneur?" asked Besme.

"Yes," returned Henry; "for thou hast avenged——"

"The Duke François!" said De Besme.

"The Catholic religion," returned Henry. Then, turning to the soldiers and citizens who filled the court and street, "To work, my friends, to work!"

"Good evening, M. de Besme," said Coconnas, approaching the German, who stood on the balcony, wiping his sword.

"It was you, then, who settled him!" cried La Hurière; "how did you manage it?"

"Oh, very easily: he heard a noise, opened his door, and I ran him through the body. But I think they are killing Teligny now, for I hear him yelling."

At this moment, several cries of distress were heard, and the windows of the long gallery that formed a wing of the hotel were lighted up with a red glare; two men were seen flying before a body of assassins. An arquebuss shot killed one; the other sprang boldly and without stopping to look at the distance from the ground, through an open window into the court below, heeding not the enemies who awaited him there.

"Kill! kill!" cried the assassins, seeing their prey about to escape them.

The fugitive picked up his sword, which in his leap had fallen from his hand, dashed through the soldiers, upset three or four, ran one through the body, and amid the pistol-shots and imprecations of the furious Catholics, darted like lightning by Coconnas, who stood ready for him at the door.

"Touched!" cried the Piedmontese, piercing his arm with his sharp blade.

"Coward!" replied the fugitive, striking him on the face with the flat of his weapon, for want of room to thrust at him with its point.

"A thousand devils!" cried Coconnas; "it's M. de la Mole!"

"M. de la Mole!" re-echoed La Hurière and Maurèvel.

"It is he who warned the admiral!" cried several soldiers.

"Kill him—kill him!" was shouted on all sides.

Coconnas, La Hurière, and half a score of soldiers, rushed in pursuit of La Mole, who, covered with blood, and having attained that state of desperation which is the last resource of human strength, dashed wildly through the streets, with no other guide than instinct. Behind him, the footsteps and shouts of his pursuers gave him wings. Occasionally a ball whistled by his ear, and made him dart forward with redoubled speed. He no longer seemed to breathe: it was a hoarse rattle which came from his chest. His pourpoint seemed to prevent his heart from beating, and he tore it off; soon his sword became too heavy for his hand, and he threw it away. The blood and perspiration matted his hair, and trickled in heavy drops down his face. Sometimes it seemed to him that he was gaining on his pursuers, and he could hear their steps die away in the distance; but at their cries, fresh murderers started up at every turn, and continued the chase; suddenly he perceived, on his left, the river, rolling silently on; he felt, like the stag at bay, an invincible desire to plunge into it; the supreme power of reason alone restrained him. On his right was the Louvre, dark and frowning, but full of strange and ominous sounds; soldiers on the drawbridge came and went, and helmets and cuirasses glittered in the moonlight. La Mole thought of the King of Navarre, as he had before thought of Coligny: they were his only protectors,—it was his last hope. He collected all his strength, and inwardly vowing to abjure his faith should he escape massacre, he rushed by the soldiers, on to the drawbridge, received another poniard stab in the side, and despite the cries of "Kill—kill!" that resounded on all sides, and the opposing weapons of the sentinels, darted like an arrow through the court, into the vestibule, mounted the staircase, then up two stories higher, recognized a door, and leaned against it, striking it violently with his hands and feet.

"Who is there?" asked a woman's voice.

"Oh, my God!" murmured La Mole—"they are coming, I hear them; 'tis I—'tis I!"

"Who are you?" said the voice.

La Mole recollected the pass-word.

"Navarre—Navarre!" cried he.

The door instantly opened. La Mole, without thanking, or even seeing Gillonne, dashed into the vestibule, then along a corridor, through two or three chambers, until, at last, he entered a room lighted by a lamp suspended from the ceiling.

Beneath curtains of velvet with gold fleurs-de-lis, in a bed of carved oak, a lady, wrapped in a dressing-gown, raised herself on her arm, and gazed with terror.

La Mole precipitated himself towards her.

"Madame," cried he, "they are killing, they are butchering my brothers—they seek to kill me also! You are queen—save me!"

And he threw himself at her feet, leaving on the carpet a large track of blood.

At the sight of a man, pale, exhausted, and bleeding at her feet, the Queen of Navarre, who, warned by Madame de Lorraine, had laid down without undressing herself, clasped her hands over her eyes, and shrieked for help.

"Madame," cried La Mole, "for the love of Heaven, do not call! If you do, I am lost, for my murderers are at hand; they are on the stairs—hark! I hear them now!"

"Help!" cried the queen—"help!"

"Ah!" said La Mole, despairingly, "you have killed me. I did not think it possible to die by so sweet a voice, so fair a hand!"

At the same time, the door flew open, and a troop of men, their faces covered with blood and blackened with powder, their swords drawn, and their pikes and arquebusses leveled, rushed into the apartment.

Coconnas was at their head—his red hair bristling, his eye flashing fire, and his cheek cut open by La Mole's sword. The Piedmontese was terrible to behold.

"*Mordi!*" cried he, "we have him at last."

La Mole looked round him for a weapon, but in vain; he glanced at the queen, and saw profound commiseration depicted in her face; he at once felt that she alone could save him; he threw his arms round her.

Coconnas advanced, and with the point of his long rapier again wounded his enemy's shoulder, and the crimson drops of warm blood stained the white and perfumed sheets of Marguerite's couch.

Marguerite saw the blood flow, and felt the shudder that ran through La Mole's frame: she threw herself with him into the recess between the bed and the wall. It was time: for La Mole was incapable of flight or resistance, his head leaned on Marguerite's shoulder, and his hand convulsively seized and tore its thin cambric covering.

"Oh, madame," murmured he, "save me."

He could say no more. A mist came over his eyes, his head sunk back, his arms fell at his side, and he sunk on the floor, bathed in his blood, and dragging the queen with him.

At this moment, Coconnas, excited by the sight of blood and exasperated by the long pursuit, advanced towards the recess; in another instant, his sword would have pierced La Mole's heart, and perhaps that of Marguerite also.

At the sight of the bare steel, and even more moved at the insolence of the man, the daughter of kings drew herself up to her full height, and sent forth such a cry of fear, indignation, and rage, that Coconnas stood petrified.

Suddenly, a door in the wall opened, and a young man of sixteen or seventeen, dressed in black and his hair in disorder, rushed in.

"Hold! hold!" cried he; "I am here, my sister—I am here!"

"François! François!" cried Marguerite—"help! help!"

"The Duke d'Alençon!" murmured La Hurière, grounding his arquebuss.

"*Mordi!* a son of France!" growled Coconnas, drawing back.

The duke glanced round him. He saw Marguerite, disheveled, more lovely than ever, leaning against the wall surrounded by men, fury in her eyes, large drops of perspiration on her forehead.

"Wretches!" cried he.

"Save me, my brother!" shrieked Marguerite. "They are going to kill me!"

The duke's pallid face became crimson. He was unarmed, but sustained, no doubt, by the consciousness of his rank, he advanced with clenched teeth and hands towards Coconnas and his companions, who retreated terrified at the lightning darting from his eyes.

"Ha! and will you murder a son of France, too?" cried the duke. Then, as they recoiled—"Without there! captain of the guard! Hang me every one of these ruffians!"

More alarmed at the sight of this weaponless young man than he would have been at the aspect of a regiment of lansquenets, Coconnas had already reached the door. La Hurière sprang after him like a deer, and the soldiers jostled and pushed each other in the vestibule, in their endeavors to escape, finding the door far too small for their great desire to be outside it. Meantime Marguerite had instinctively thrown the damask coverlid of her bed over La Mole, and withdrawn from him.

No sooner had the last murderer departed, than the duke turned to his sister.

"Are you hurt?" cried he, seeing Marguerite covered with blood. And he darted towards his sister with an anxiety that did credit to his fraternal tenderness.

"No," said she, "I think not; or if I am, it is but slightly."

"But this blood," said the duke; "whence comes it?"

"I know not," replied she, "one of those wretches seized me, and perhaps he was wounded."

"What!" cried the duke, "dare to touch my sister? Oh, had you but shown him to me—did I but know where to find him——"

"Leave me," said Marguerite.

"Well, Marguerite," said he, "I will go; but you cannot remain alone this dreadful night. Shall I call Gillonne?"

"No, no! leave me, François—leave me!"

The prince obeyed; and hardly had he disappeared, than Marguerite, hearing a groan from the recess, hastily bolted the door of the secret passage, and then hastening to the other entrance, closed it just as a troop of archers dashed by in hot chase of some other Huguenot residents in the Louvre.

After glancing round, to assure herself she was really alone, she lifted the covering that had concealed La Mole from the Duke d'Alençon, and tremblingly drawing the apparently lifeless body, by great exertion, into the middle of the room, and finding the victim still breathed, sat down, placed his head on her knees, and sprinkled his face with water.

Then it was that the mask of blood, dust, and gunpowder which had covered his face being removed, Marguerite recognized the handsome cavalier who, full of life and hope, had but three or four hours before solicited her protection and that of the King of Navarre; and whilst dazzled by her own beauty, had attracted her attention by his own.

Marguerite uttered a cry of terror, for now it was more than mere pity that she felt for the wounded man—it was interest. He was no longer a stranger; he was almost an acquaintance. By her care, La Mole's fine features soon reappeared, free from stain, but pale and distorted by pain. A shudder ran through her whole frame, as she tremblingly placed her hand on his heart. It still beat. She then took a smelling-bottle from the table and applied it to his nostrils.

La Mole opened his eyes.

"Oh! *mon Dieu!*" murmured he—"where am I?"

"Saved!" said Marguerite. "Reassure yourself—you are saved."

La Mole turned his eyes on the queen, gazed earnestly for a moment, and murmuring—"Oh, loveliest of the lovely!" closed his lids, as if overpowered, and sent forth a long, deep sigh.

Marguerite started. He had become still paler than before, if that were possible, and she feared that sigh was his last.

"Oh, Heaven!" she cried, "have pity on him!"

At this moment a violent knocking was heard at the door. Marguerite half raised herself, still supporting La Mole.

"Who is there?" she cried.

"Madame, it is I—it is I," replied a female voice; "the Duchess de Nevers."

"Henriette!" cried Marguerite. "There is no danger; it is my friend. Do you hear me, sir?"

La Mole contrived to raise himself on one knee.

"Endeavor to support yourself," said the queen.

La Mole, resting his hand on the ground, managed to keep his equilibrium.

Marguerite advanced towards the door, but stopped suddenly.

"Ah, you are not alone!" she said, hearing the clash of arms outside.

"No, I have twelve guards, that my brother-in-law, M. de Guise, assigned me."

"M. de Guise!" murmured La Mole. "The assassin—the assassin!"

"Silence!" said Marguerite. "Not a word!"

And she looked round, to see where she could conceal the wounded man.

"A sword! a dagger!" muttered La Mole.

"To defend yourself—useless! Did you not hear? They are twelve, and you alone."

"Not to defend myself, but that I may not fall alive into their hands."

"No, no!" said Marguerite. "I will save you. Ah! this cabinet! Come! come!"

La Mole made an effort, and, supported by Marguerite, dragged himself to the cabinet. Marguerite locked the door upon him, and hid the key in her alms-purse.

"Not a sound, not a movement," whispered she, through the lattice-work, "and you are saved."

Then hastily throwing a mantle round her, she opened the door for her friend, who tenderly embraced her.

"Ah!" cried Madame Nevers, "you are unhurt then?"

"Quite," replied Marguerite, wrapping the mantle still more closely round her, to conceal the blood on her dress.

"'Tis well. However, M. de Guise has given me twelve of his guards to escort me to his hotel, and as I do not need so many, I will leave six with your majesty. Six of the duke's guards are worth a regiment of the king's to-night."

Marguerite dared not refuse: she placed the soldiers in the corridor, and embraced the duchess, who then returned to the Hôtel de Guise, where she resided in her husband's absence.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MURDERERS.

COCONNAS had not fled, he had but retreated; La Hurière had not fled, he had flown. The one had disappeared like a tiger, the other like a wolf.

The consequence was, that La Huriére had already reached the Place-Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois, when Coconnas had only just quitted the Louvre.

La Hurière was prudently thinking of returning home, but as he turned the corner, in the Rue de l'Arbre-Sec, he fell in with a troop of Swiss and light horse, led by Maurevel.

"Well!" exclaimed the latter, who had christened himself the King's Killer, "have you finished already? What the devil have you done with our Piedmontese gentleman? Has any mischance happened to him? It would be a pity, for he went to work like a hero."

"I hope not," responded La Hurière; "and where are you going to?"

"Oh, I have a small private affair."

"Then let me go with you," said a voice which made Maurevel start; "for you know all the good places."

"It is M. de Coconnas," said La Hurière.

"Ah! you have come from the Louvre. Did your Huguenot, then, take refuge there?" asked Maurevel.

"*Mon Dieu!* yes."

"I gave him a pistol-shot at the moment when he was picking up his sword in the admiral's courtyard, but I somehow or other missed him."

"I," added Coconnas, "did not miss him: I gave him such a thrust in the back that my sword was wet five inches up the blade. Besides, I saw him fall into the arms of Madame Marguerite, a fine woman, *mordi!* yet I confess I should not be sorry to hear he was really dead; the vagabond is infernally spiteful, and capable of bearing me a grudge all his life."

"Do you mean to go with me?"

"Why, I do not like standing still. *Mordi!* I have only killed three or four as yet, and when I get cold my shoulder pains me.—Forward! forward!"

"Captain," said Maurevel to the commander of the troop, "give me three men, and go on your own way with the rest."

Three Swiss were desired to follow Maurevel, who followed by Coconnas and La Hurière, went towards the Rue Sainte Avoiè.

"Where the devil are we going?" asked Coconnas.

"To the Rue de Chaume, where we have important business."

"Tell me," said Coconnas, "is not the Rue du Chaume near the Temple?"

"Why?"

"Because an old creditor of our family lives there, one Lambert Mercandon, to whom my father has desired me to hand over a hundred rose nobles I have in my pocket for that purpose."

"Well," replied Maurevel, "this is a good opportunity for paying it. This is the day for settling old accounts. Is your Mercandon a Huguenot?"

"Oh, I understand!" said Coconnas; "he must be——"

"Hush! here we are."

"What is that large hotel, with its entrance on the street?"

"The Hôtel de Guise."

"Truly," returned Coconnas, "I ought not to have failed coming here, as I am under the patronage of the great Henry. But *mordi!* all is so very quiet in this quarter, we might fancy ourselves in the country. Devil fetch me, but everybody is asleep!"

And indeed the Hôtel de Guise seemed as quiet as in ordinary times. All the windows were closed, and a solitary light burned behind the blind of the principal window over the entrance. At the corner of the Rue des Quatre-Fils, Maurevel stopped.

"This is the house of him we seek," he said. "Do you, La Hurière, with your sleek look, knock at the door; hand your arquebuss to M. de Coconnas, who has been ogling it this last half hour. If you are introduced, you must ask to speak to M. de Mouy."

"Oh!" said Coconnas, "now I understand—you have a creditor in the quarter of the Temple, it would seem."

"Exactly so!" responded Maurevel. "You will go up to him in the character of a Huguenot, and inform M. de Mouy of all that has passed: he is brave, and will come down."

"And once down——?" asked La Hurière.

"Once down, I will beg of him to cross swords with me."

La Hurière, without making any reply knocked at the door, and the sounds echoing in the silence of the night caused the doors of the Hôtel de Guise to open, and several heads to make their appearance from out them; it was then evident that the hotel was quiet, after the fashion of citadels, that is to say, in being filled with soldiers. The heads were instantly withdrawn, guessing, no doubt, what was the matter.

"Does your M. de Mouy live here?" inquired Coconnas, pointing to the house at which La Hurière continued to knock.

"No, but his mistress does."

"*Mordi!* how gallant you are, to give him an occasion to draw sword in the presence of his lady-love! We shall be the judges of the field. I should like very well to fight myself—my shoulder burns."

"And your face," asked Maurevel, "it is considerably damaged, is it not?"

Coconnas uttered a kind of growl.

"*Mordi!*" he said, "I hope he is dead; if I thought not, I would return to the Louvre and finish him."

La Hurière still kept knocking.

Soon the window on the first floor opened, and a man appeared in the balcony, in a nightcap and drawers, and unarmed.

"Who's there?" cried he.

Maurevel made a sign to the Swiss, who retreated into a corner, whilst Coconnas stood close against the wall.

"Ah! Monsieur de Mouy!" said the innkeeper, in his blandest tones, "is that you?"

"Yes; what then?"

"It is he!" said Maurevel, joyfully.

"Well, then, sir," continued La Hurière, "do you not know what is going on? They are murdering the admiral, and all of our religion. Hasten to their assistance!"

"Ah!" exclaimed De Mouy, "I feared something was plotted for this night. I ought not to have quitted my brave comrades. I will come, my friend—wait for me."

And without closing the window, through which issued the voice of a female in alarm, uttering tender supplications, M. de Mouy put on his doublet, cloak, and weapons.

"He is coming down, he is coming down; be ready!" murmured Maurevel, pale with joy, and taking the arquebuss from Coconnas, and blazing the match, to see that it was alight, returned it to La Hurière.

"*Mordi!*" exclaimed Coconnas, "the moon is coming out, to see this beautiful little fight. I would give a great deal if Lambert Mercandon were here, to serve as M. de Mouy's second."

"Wait, wait!" said Maurevel; "M. de Mouy is equal to several men himself, and it is likely that we six shall have enough to do to despatch him. Forward, my men!" continued Maurevel, making a sign to the Swiss to stand by the door, in order to strike De Mouy as he came forth.

"Ah! ah!" said Coconnas, as he watched these arrangements, "it appears that this will not come off quite as I expected."

Already was heard the sound of the bar which De Mouy moved aside. The Swiss were at the door; Maurevel and La Hurière came forward on tiptoe, whilst, from a feeling of honor, Coconnas remained where he was, when a young female, whom no one had expected, appeared, in her turn, in the balcony, and gave a terrible shriek when she saw the Swiss, Maurevel, and La Hurière.

De Mouy, who had already half-opened the door paused.

"Return, return!" cried the damsel. "I see swords glitter, and the match of an arquebuss—there is treachery!"

"Ah! ah!" said the young man, "let us see, then, what it means."

And he closed the door, replaced the bar, and went upstairs again.

Maurevel's order of battle was changed, as soon as he saw that De Mouy did not come out. The Swiss went and posted themselves at the other corner of the street, and La Hurière, with his arquebuss in his hand, awaited the reappearance of the enemy at the window.

He did not wait long.

De Mouy came forward, holding before him two pistols of such respectable length, that La Hurière, who was taking aim, suddenly reflected that the Huguenot's balls had no further to go in reaching him, than had his to reach the balcony. "It is true," said he, "I may kill the gentleman; but it is equally true that the gentleman may kill me!" and this reflection determined him to retreat into an angle of the Rue de Brac, so far off, as to make any aim of his at De Mouy somewhat uncertain.

De Mouy cast a glance around him, and advanced like a man preparing to fight a duel ; but seeing nothing, he exclaimed :

"Why, it appears, my friend, that you have forgotten your arquebuss at my door! I am here. What do you want with me?"

"Ah, ah!" said Coconnas to himself; "this is a brave fellow!"

"Well," continued De Mouy, "friends or enemies, whichever you are, do you not see I am waiting?"

La Hurière kept silence, Maurevel made no reply, and the three Swiss remained in covert.

Coconnas paused an instant ; then, seeing that no one continued the conversation begun by La Hurière and followed by De Mouy, left his station, and advancing into the middle of the street, took off his hat, and said :

"Sir, we are not here for an assassination, as you seem to suppose, but for a duel. Eh, *mordi!* come forward, Monsieur de Maurevel, instead of turning your back. The gentleman accepts."

"Maurevel!" cried De Mouy ; "Maurevel, the assassin of my father! Maurevel, the king's assassin! Ah, *pardieu!* Yes, I accept."

And taking aim at Maurevel, who was about to knock at the Hôtel de Guise to request a reinforcement, he sent a ball through his hat.

At the noise of the report and Maurevel's cries, the guard which had escorted Madame de Nevers came out, accompanied by three or four gentlemen, followed by their pages, and approached the house of young De Mouy's mistress.

A second pistol-shot, fired into the midst of the troop, killed the soldier next to Maurevel ; after which, De Mouy, having no longer any loaded arms, sheltered himself within the gallery of the balcony.

Meantime, windows began to be opened in every direction, and according to the respective dispositions of their pacific or bellicose inhabitants, were closed, or bristled with muskets and arquebusses.

"Help! my worthy Mercandon," shouted De Mouy, making a sign to a man in years, who from a window which opened in front of the Hôtel de Guise, was trying to make out the cause of the confusion.

"Is it you who call, Sire de Mouy?" cried the old man; "is it you they are attacking?"

"Me—you—all the Protestants; and there—there is the proof!"

That moment, De Mouy had seen La Hurière direct his arquebuss at him: it was fired; but the young man stooped, and the ball broke a window behind him.

"Mercandon!" exclaimed Coconnas, who, in his delight at sight of the tumult, had forgotten his creditor, but was reminded of him by this apostrophe of De Mouy—"Mercandon, Rue du Chaume—that is it! Ah, he lives there! Good! We shall each arrange our affairs with our men!"

And, whilst the people from the Hôtel de Guise broke in the doors of De Mouy's house, and Maurevel, torch in hand, tried to set it on fire—whilst, the doors once broken, there was a fearful struggle with an antagonist who at each pistol-shot and each rapier-thrust brought down his foe—Coconnas tried, by the help of a paving-stone, to break in the door of Mercandon, who, unmoved by this solitary effort, was doing his best with his arquebuss out of his window.

And now, all this desert and obscure quarter was lighted up, as if by open day—peopled like the interior of an ant-hive; for, from the Hôtel de Montmorency, six or eight Huguenot gentlemen, with their servants and friends, issuing forth, made a furious charge, and began, supported by the firing from the windows, to repulse Maurevel's and the De Guises' force, whom at length they drove back to the place whence they had come.

Coconnas, who had not yet managed to drive in Mercandon's door, though he tried to do so with all his might, was surprised in this sudden retreat. Placing his back to the wall, and grasping his sword firmly, he began, not only to defend himself, but to attack his assailants, with cries so terrible, that they were heard above all the uproar. He struck right and left, hitting friends and enemies, until a wide space was cleared around him. In proportion as his rapier made a hole in some breast, and the warm blood spurted over on his hands and face, he, with dilated eye, expanded nostrils, and clenched teeth, regained the ground he had lost, and again approached the beleaguered house.

De Mouy, after a terrible combat in the staircase and hall, had ended by coming out of the burning house like a true hero. In the midst of all the struggle, he had not ceased to cry: "Here, Maurevel!—Maurevel, where are you?" insulting him by the most opprobrious epithets. He at length appeared in the street, supporting on one arm his mistress, half naked and nearly fainting, and holding a poniard between his teeth. His sword, flaming by the sweeping action he gave it, traced circles of white or red, according as the moon glittered on the blade, or a flambeau glared on its blood-stained brightness. Maurevel had fled. La Hurière, driven back by De Mouy as far as Coconnas, who did not recognize him, and received him at sword's point, entreated mercy on both sides. At this moment, Mercandon perceived him, and knew him, by his white scarf, to be one of the murderers. He fired. La Hurière shrieked, threw up his arms, dropped his arquebuss, and, after having vainly attempted to reach the wall, in order to support himself, fell with his face flat on the earth.

De Mouy, profiting by this circumstance, turned down the Rue de Paradis, and disappeared.

Such had been the resistance of the Huguenots, that the De Guise party, quite repulsed, had retired into their hotel, fearing to be besieged and taken in their own habitation.

Coconnas, who, drunk with blood and riot, had reached that degree of excitement when, with the men of the South more especially, courage changes into madness, had not seen or heard anything, was going towards a man lying with his face downwards in a pool of blood, and whom he recognized for La Hurière, when the door of the house he had in vain tried to burst in opened, and old Mercandon, followed by his son and two nephews, rushed upon him.

"Here he is! here he is!" cried they all, with one voice.

Coconnas was in the middle of the street, and fearing to be surrounded by these four men who assailed him at once, gave one of those chamois bounds which he had so often practised in his native mountains, and in an instant found himself with his back against the wall of the Hôtel de Guise. Once at ease as to not being surprised from behind, he put himself in a posture of defense, and said, jestingly, "Ah! ah! Daddy Mercandon, don't you know me?"

"Wretch!" cried the old Huguenot, "I know you well; you are engaged against me—me, the friend and companion of your father!"

"And his creditor, are you not?"

"Yes; his creditor, as you say."

"Well, then," said Coconnas, "I have come to settle the account."

"Seize him, bind him!" said Mercandon to the young men who accompanied him, and who at his bidding rushed towards the Piedmontese.

"One moment! one moment!" said Coconnas, laughing, "to seize a man you must have a writ, and you have forgotten that."

And with these words, he crossed his sword with the young man nearest to him and at the first blow cut his wrist to the bone.

The wounded man retreated, with a shriek of agony.

"That will do for one!" said Coconnas.

At the same moment, the window under which Coconnas had sought shelter, opened. He sprang on one side, fearing an attack from behind; but, instead of an enemy, it was a woman he beheld; instead of the enemy's weapon he was prepared to encounter, it was a nosegay that fell at his feet.

"Ah!" he said, "a woman!" He saluted the lady with his sword, and stooped to pick up the bouquet.

"Be on your guard, brave Catholic!—be on your guard!" cried the lady.

Coconnas rose, but not before the dagger of the second nephew had pierced his cloak, and wounded his other shoulder.

The lady uttered a piercing shriek.

Coconnas thanked her, assured her by a gesture, and then made a pass at the nephew, which he parried; but at the second thrust, his foot slipped in the blood, and Coconnas, springing at him like a tiger-cat, drove his sword through his breast.

"Good! good! brave cavalier!" exclaimed the lady of the Hôtel de Guise—"good! I will send you succor."

"Do not give yourself any trouble about that, madame," was Coconnas's reply; "rather look on to the end, if it interests you, and see how the Comte Annibal de Coconnas settles the Huguenots."

At this moment the son of old Mercandon placed a pistol almost close to Coconnas, and fired. The count fell on his knee. The lady at the window shrieked again; but Coconnas rose instantly; he had only knelt to avoid the ball, which struck the wall about two feet beneath where the lady was standing.

Almost at the same moment there issued a cry of rage from the window of Mercandon's house, and an old woman who recognized Coconnas as a Catholic, from his white scarf and cross, threw a flower-pot at him, which struck him above the knee.

"Bravo!" said Coconnas; "one throws me flowers and the other flower-pots."

"Thanks, mother—thanks!" said the young man.

"Go on wife, go on," said old Mercandon; "but take care of yourself."

"Ah!" said Coconnas, "the women are in arms, then, some for me, and others against me! *Mordi!* let us end this."

The scene, in fact, was much changed; and evidently drew near its close. Coconnas was wounded in the face, it is true, but in all the vigour of four-and-twenty, used to arms, and irritated rather than weakened by the three or four scratches he had received; whilst on the other side there remained only Mercandon and his son, an old man of sixty or seventy years, and a stripling of sixteen or eighteen, pale, fair, and weak, and who, having discharged his pistol, which was consequently useless, was brandishing a sword half the length of that of the Piedmontese. The father, armed only with a dagger and a discharged arquebuss, was calling for help. An old woman, looking out of the window, held a piece of marble in her hand, which she was preparing to hurl down. Coconnas, excited on the one hand by menaces, and on the other by encouragements, proud of his twofold victory, drunken with powder and blood, lighted by the reflection of a house in flames, warmed by the idea that he was fighting under the eyes of a female whose beauty was as superior as he felt assured she was of high rank—Coconnas, like the last of the Horatii, felt his strength redouble, and seeing the young man falter, rushed on him and crossed his small weapon with his terrible and bloody rapier. Two blows sufficed to drive it out of his hands. Then Mercandon tried to drive Coconnas back, so that the projectiles thrown from the window might be sure to strike him, but Coconnas, to paralyze the double attack of the old man, who tried to stab him with his dagger, and the mother of the young man, who was endeavoring to break his skull with the stone she was ready to throw, seized his adversary by the body, presenting him against all the blows, as a buckler, and well nigh strangling him in his Herculean grasp.

"Help! help!" cried the young man, "he is breaking my breast-bone—help! help!" and his voice grew faint in a low and choking groan.

Then Mercandon ceased to attack, and began to entreat.

"Mercy, mercy! Monsieur de Coconnas, mercy!—he is my only child!"

"He is my son, my son!" cried the mother; "the hope of our old age! Do not kill him, sir—do not kill him!"

"Really," cried Coconnas, bursting into laughter, "not kill him! What did he mean, then, to do with me, with his sword and pistol?"

"Sir," said Mercandon, clasping his hands, "I have at home your father's undertaking, I will return it to you—I have ten thousand crowns of gold, I will give them to you—I have the jewels of our family, they shall be yours; but do not kill him!—do not kill him!"

"And I have my love," said the lady in the Hôtel de Guise, in a low tone, "and I promise it you."

Coconnas reflected a moment, and said suddenly:

"Are you a Huguenot?"

"Yes," murmured the youth.

"Then you must die!" replied Coconnas, frowning, and putting to his adversary's breast his keen and glittering dagger.

"Die!" cried the old man; "my poor child, die!"

And the shriek of the mother resounded so piercingly and loud, that for a moment it shook the firm resolution of the Piedmontese.

"Oh, madame la duchesse!" cried the father turning towards the lady at the Hôtel de Guise, "intercede for us, and every morning and evening you shall be remembered in our prayers."

"Then let him be a convert," said the lady.

"I am a Protestant," said the boy.

"Then die!" exclaimed Coconnas, lifting his dagger; "die! since you will not accept the life which that lovely mouth offers to you." Mercandon and his wife saw the blade of that deadly weapon gleam like lightning above the head of their son.

"My son Olivier," shrieked his mother, "abjure, abjure!"

"Abjure, my dear boy!" cried Mercandon, going on his knees to Coconnas; "do not leave us alone on the earth!"

"Abjure altogether," said Coconnas; "for one *Credo*, three souls and one life."

"I will!" said the youth.

"We will!" cried Mercandon and his wife.

"On your knees then," said Coconnas, "and let your son repeat after me, word for word, the prayer I shall say."

The father obeyed first.

"I am ready," said the son, also kneeling.

Coconnas then began to repeat in Latin the words of the *Credo*. But whether from chance or calculation, young Olivier knelt close to where his sword had fallen. Scarcely did he see this weapon within his reach, than, not ceasing to repeat the words which Coconnas dictated, he stretched out his hand to take it up. Coconnas watched the movement, although he pretended not to see it; but at the moment when the young man touched the handle of the sword with his fingers, he rushed on him, knocked him over, and plunged his dagger in his throat, exclaiming:

"Traitor!"

The youth uttered one cry, raised himself convulsively on his knee, and fell dead.

"Ah, ruffian!" shrieked Mercandon, "you slay us to rob us of the hundred rose nobles you owe us."

"*Ma foi!* no," said Coconnas, "and here's the proof;" and so saying, he threw at the old man's feet the purse which his father had given him before his departure to pay his creditor.

"And here's your death!" cried the old woman from the window.

"Take care, M. de Coconnas—take care!" called out the lady at the Hôtel de Guise.

But before Coconnas could turn his head to comply with this advice, or get out of the way of the threat, a heavy mass came hissing through the air, falling on the hat of the Piedmontese, breaking his sword, and prostrating him on the pavement: he was overcome, crushed, so that he did not hear the double cry of joy and distress which came from the right and left.

Mercandon instantly rushed dagger in hand on Coconnas, bereft of sense; but at this moment the door of the Hôtel de Guise opened, and the old man, seeing swords and partisans gleaming, fled, whilst the lady he had called the duchess, whose beauty seemed terrible by the light of the flames, all dazzling as she was with gems and diamonds, leaned half out of the window, in order to direct the newcomers, her arm extended towards Coconnas.

"There! there! in front of me—a gentleman in a red doublet. There!—that is he—yes, that is he."

CHAPTER X.

DEATH, MASS, OR THE BASTILLE.

Marguerite, as we have said, had shut the door, and returned to her chamber. But as she entered, all breathless, she saw Gillonne, who, terror-struck, was leaning against the door of the cabinet, gazing on the traces of blood on the bed, the furniture, and the carpet.

"Oh, madame," she exclaimed, "is he then dead?"

"Silence, Gillonne!" and Gillonne was silent.

Marguerite then took from her gypsire a small gold key, opened the door of the cabinet, and pointed to the young man.

La Mole had succeeded in raising himself, and going towards the window; a small poniard, such as females of the period wore, was in his hand.

"Fear nothing, sir," said Marguerite; "for, on my soul, you are in safety!"

La Mole sank on his knees.

"Oh, madame," he cried, "you are more than a queen—you are a divinity?"

"Do not agitate yourself, sir," said Marguerite, "your blood flows still. Oh, look, Gillonne, how pale he is! Let us see where you are wounded."

"Madame," said La Mole, trying to fix on certain parts of his body the pain which pervaded his whole frame, "I think I have a dagger-thrust in my shoulder, another in my chest—the other wounds are mere trifles."

"We will see," said Marguerite. "Gillonne, bring me my casket with the balms in it."

Gillonne obeyed, and returned, holding in one hand a casket, and in the other a silver basin and some fine Holland linen.

"Help me to rouse him, Gillonne," said Queen Marguerite; "for in attempting to rouse himself the poor gentleman has lost all his strength."

"Oh!" cried La Mole, "I would rather die than see you, the queen, stain your hands with blood as unworthy as mine. Oh, never, never!"

"Your blood, sir," replied Gillonne, with a smile, "has already stained the bed and apartments of her majesty."

Marguerite folded her mantle over her cambric dressing-gown, all bespattered with small red spots.

"Madame," stammered La Mole, "can you not leave me to the care of the surgeon?"

"Of a Catholic surgeon, perhaps," said the queen, with an expression which La Mole comprehended, and which made him shudder.

"Come, Gillonne, let us to work!"

La Mole again endeavored to resist, and repeated that he would rather die than occasion the queen labor, which, though begun in pity, must end in disgust; but this exertion completely exhausted his strength, and falling back, he fainted a second time.

Marguerite, then seizing the poniard which he had dropped, quickly cut the lace of his doublet; whilst Gillonne, with another blade, ripped open the sleeves.

Next, Gillonne, with a cloth dipped in fresh water, stanched the blood which escaped from his shoulder and breast, and Marguerite with a silver needle with a round point, probed the wounds with all the delicacy and skill that Ambroise Paré could have displayed.

"A dangerous, but not mortal wound, *acerrimum humeri vulnus, non autem lethale,*" murmured the lovely and learned lady-surgeon; "hand me the salve, Gillonne, and get the lint ready."

Gillonne had already dried and perfumed the young man's chest and arms, modeled on the antique, as well as his shoulders, which fell gracefully back; his neck shaded by thick hair, and which seemed rather to belong to a statue of Paros, than the mangled frame of a dying man.

"Poor young man!" murmured Gillonne.

"Is he not handsome?" said Marguerite, with royal frankness.

"Yes, madame; but I think we should lift him on the bed."

"Yes," said Marguerite, "you are right:" and the two women, uniting their strength, raised La Mole, and deposited him on a kind of large sofa in front of the window, which they partly opened.

This movement aroused La Mole, who heaved a sigh; and opening his eyes, began to find that delightful sensation which accompanies every healing application to a wounded man, when, on his return to consciousness, he finds freshness instead of burning heat, and the perfumes of new applications instead of the noisome odor of blood.

He muttered some unconnected words, to which Marguerite replied by a smile, placing her finger on her mouth.

At this moment several blows were struck at the door.

"Some one knocks at the secret passage," said Marguerite; "I will go and see who it is. Do you remain here, and do not leave him for a single moment."

Marguerite went into the chamber, and closing the door of the cabinet, opened that of the passage which led to the king's and queen-mother's apartments.

"Madame de Sauve!" she exclaimed, retreating suddenly, and with an expression which resembled hatred, if not terror: so true it is that a woman never forgives another for carrying off from her even a man whom she does not love: "Madame de Sauve!"

"Yes, your majesty!" she replied, clasping her hands.

"You here, madame?" exclaimed Marguerite, more and more surprised, and at the same time more and more imperative.

Charlotte fell on her knees.

"Madame," she said, "pardon me! I know how guilty I am towards you; but if you knew—the fault is not wholly mine; an express command of the queen-mother——"

"Rise!" said Marguerite, "and as I do not suppose you have come with the intention of justifying yourself to me, tell me why you have come at all?"

"I have come, madame," said Charlotte, still on her knees, and with a look of wild alarm, "I came to ask you if he were not here?"

"Here! who?—of whom are you speaking, madame? for I really do not understand."

"Of the king!"

"Of the king? What, do you follow him to my apartments? You know very well that he never comes hither."

"Ah, madame!" continued the Baroness de Sauve, without replying to these attacks, or even seeming to comprehend them, "ah, would to Heaven he were here!"

"And wherefore?"

"Eh, *mon Dieu!* madame, because they are murdering the Huguenots, and the King of Navarre is the chief of the Huguenots.'

"Oh!" cried Marguerite, seizing Madame de Sauve by the hand, and compelling her to rise; "ah! I had forgotten! Besides, I did not think a king could run the same dangers as other men."

"More, madame—a thousand times more!" cried Charlotte.

"In fact, Madame de Lorraine had warned me; I had begged him not to leave the Louvre. Has he done so?"

"No, madame, he is in the Louvre; but if he is not here——"

"He is not here!"

"Oh!" cried Madame de Sauve, with a burst of agony, "then he is a dead man, for the queen-mother has sworn his destruction!"

"His destruction! ah," said Marguerite, "you terrify me—impossible!"

"Madame," replied Madame de Sauve, with that energy which passion alone can give, "I tell you that no one knows where the King of Navarre is."

"And where is the queen-mother?"

"The queen-mother sent me to seek M. de Guise and M. de Tavannes, who were in her oratory, and then dismissed me."

"And my husband has not been in your apartment?" inquired Marguerite.

"He has not, madame. I have sought him everywhere, and asked everybody for him. One soldier told me he thought he had seen him in the midst of the guards who accompanied him, with his sword drawn in his hand, some time before the massacre begun, and the massacre has begun this hour."

"Thanks, madame," said Marguerite; "and although perhaps the sentiment which impels you is an additional offense towards me,—yet, again, thanks!"

"Oh, forgive me, madame!" she said, "and I shall return to my apartments more fortified by your pardon, for I dare not follow you, even at a distance."

Marguerite extended her hand to her.

"I will seek Queen Catherine," she said, "and return to you. The King of Navarre is under my safeguard; I have promised him my alliance, and I will be faithful to my promise."

"But suppose you cannot obtain access to the queen-mother, madame?"

"Then I will go to my brother Charles, and I will speak to him."

"Go, madame, go," said Charlotte, "and may God guide your majesty!"

Marguerite passed quickly along the passage, and Madame de Sauve followed her.

The Queen of Navarre saw her turn to her own apartment, and then went herself towards the queen's chamber.

All was changed here. Instead of the crowd of eager courtiers, who usually opened their ranks before the queen and respectfully saluted her, Marguerite met only guards with red partisans and garments stained with blood, or gentlemen in torn mantles—their faces blackened with powder, bearing orders and despatches,—some going in, others going out, and all these entrances and exits made a terrible and immense confusion in the galleries.

Marguerite, however, went boldly on until she reached the antechamber of the queen-mother, which was guarded by a double file of soldiers, who only allowed those to enter who had the proper countersign. Marguerite in vain tried to pass this living barrier: several times she saw the door open and shut, and at each time she saw Catherine moving and excited, as if she were only twenty years of age, writing, receiving letters, opening them, addressing a word to one, a smile to another; and those on whom she smiled most graciously, were those who were the most covered with dust and blood.

Without the walls was heard, from time to time, the report of fire-arms.

"I shall never reach him!" said Marguerite, after having made several vain attempts to pass the soldiers.

At this moment, M. de Guise passed: he had come to inform the queen of the murder of the admiral, and was returning to the butchery.

"Oh, Henri!" cried Marguerite, "where is the King of Navarre?"

The duke looked at her with a smile of astonishment, bowed, and, without any reply, passed on.

"Ah, my dear René," said the queen, recognizing Catherine's perfumer, "is that you?—you have just left my mother. Do you know what has become of my husband?"

"His majesty the King of Navarre is no friend of mine, madame—that you know very well. It is even said," he added, with a horrid smile—"it is even said, that he ventures to accuse me of having been the accomplice, with Queen Catherine, in poisoning his mother."

"No, no!" cried Marguerite, "my good René, do not believe that!"

"Oh, it is of little consequence, madame!" said the perfumer; "neither the King of Navarre nor his party are any longer to be feared!"

And he turned his back on Marguerite.

"Ah, Monsieur de Tavannes!" cried Marguerite, "one word, I beseech you!"

Tavannes stopped.

"Where is Henry of Navarre?"

"*Ma foi,*" he replied, in a loud voice, "I believe he is somewhere in the city with the Messieurs d'Alençon and De Condé."

And then he added, in a tone so low that the queen alone could hear:

"Your majesty, if you would see him—to be in whose place I would give my life—go to the king's armory."

"Thanks, Tavannes—thanks!" said Marguerite; "I will go there."

And she went on her way thither, murmuring:

"Oh, after all I promised him—after the way in which he behaved to me when that ingrate, Henri de Guise, was concealed in the closet—I cannot let him perish!"

And she knocked at the door of the king's apartments; but they were begirt within by two companies of guards.

"No one is admitted to the king," said the officer, coming forward.

"But I——" said Marguerite.

"The order is general."

"I, the Queen of Navarre!—I, his sister!"

"I dare make no exception, madame."

And the officer closed the door.

"He is lost!" exclaimed Marguerite, alarmed at the sight of all the sinister countenances she had seen. "Yes, yes! I comprehend all. I have been used as a bait. I am the snare which has entrapped the Huguenots: but I will enter, if I should be killed in the attempt!"

And Marguerite ran like a mad creature through the corridors and galleries, when suddenly, whilst passing by a small door, she heard a low chanting, almost as melancholy as it was monotonous. It was a Calvinistic psalm, sung by a trembling voice in an adjacent chamber.

"The nurse of my brother the king—the good Madelon —it is she!" exclaimed Marguerite. "God of the Christians, aid me now!"

And, full of hope, Marguerite knocked at the little door.

Soon after the counsel which Marguerite had conveyed to him, after his conversation with René, and after quitting the queen-mother's chamber, poor Phœbé, like a good genius, opposing, Henry of Navarre had met some worthy Catholic gentlemen, who, under a pretext of doing him honor, had escorted him to his apartments, where a score of Huguenots awaited him, who had rallied round the young prince, and, having once rallied, would not leave him—so strongly, for some hours, had the presentiment of that night weighed on the Louvre. They had remained there, without any one attempting to disturb them. At last, at the first stroke of the bell of St.-Germain-l'Auxerrois, which resounded through all hearts like a funeral knell, Tavannes entered, and, in the midst of a deathlike silence, announced that King Charles IX. desired to speak to Henry.

It was useless to attempt resistance, and no one thought of it. They had heard the ceilings, galleries, and corridors crack beneath the feet of the assembled soldiers, who were in the courtyards, as well as in the apartments, to the number of two thousand. Henry, after having taken leave of his friends, whom he might never again see, followed Tavannes, who led him to a small gallery contiguous to the king's apartments, where he left him alone, unarmed, and a prey to mistrust.

The King of Navarre counted here alone, minute by minute, two mortal hours; listening, with increasing alarm, to the sound of the tocsin and the discharge of firearms; seeing through a small window, by the light of the flames and flambeaux, the victims and their assassins pass; understanding nothing of these shrieks of murder—these cries of distress—not even suspecting, in spite of his knowledge of Charles IX., the queen mother, and the Duke de Guise, the horrible drama at this moment enacting.

Henry had not physical courage, but he had better than that—he had moral fortitude. Fearing danger, he yet smiled at and faced it; but it was danger in the field of battle—danger in the open air—danger in the eyes of all, and attended by the noisy harmony of trumpets and the loud and vibrating beat of drums,—but now he was without arms, shut up, immured in obscurity which was scarcely sufficient to enable him to see the enemy who might glide towards him, and the weapon that might be raised to strike him.

These two hours were, perhaps, the most agonizing of his life.

In the hottest of the tumult, and as Henry was beginning to comprehend that, in all probability, this was some organized massacre, a captain came to him, desiring the prince to follow him to the king. As they approached, the door opened, and closed when they entered. The captain then led Henry to the king, who was in his armory. When they entered, the king was seated in an armchair, his two hands placed on the two arms of the seat, and his head falling on his bosom. As they entered, Charles looked up, and on his brow Henry observed the perspiration dropping from it like large beads.

"Good evening, Harry," said the king, roughly. "La Chastre, leave us."

The captain retired, and a profound silence ensued. Henry looked around him with uneasiness, and saw that he was alone with the king. Charles suddenly arose.

"*Mordieu!*" said he, passing his hands through his light brown hair, and wiping his brow at the same time, "you are glad to be with me, are not you, Harry?"

"Certainly, sire," replied the King of Navarre, "I am always happy to be with your majesty."

"Happier than if you were down there, eh?" continued Charles, following his own thoughts, rather than replying to Henry's compliment.

"I do not understand, sire," replied Henry.

'Look out, then, and you will soon understand."

And with a quick gesture, Charles moved, or rather sprung towards the window, and drawing his brother-in-law towards him, who became more and more alarmed, he pointed to him the horrible outlines of the assassins, who, on the deck of a boat, were cutting the throats or drowning the victims brought them at every moment.

"In the name of Heaven!" cried Henry, "what is going on to-night?"

"To-night, sir," replied Charles IX., "they are ridding me of all the Huguenots. Look down there, over the Hôtel de Bourbon, at the smoke and flames: they are the smoke and flames of the admiral's house, which has been fired. Do you see that body, which these good Catholics are drawing on a torn mattress—it is the corpse of the admiral's son-in-law—the carcass of your friend, Teligny."

"What means this?" cried the King of Navarre, seeking vainly by his side for the hilt of his dagger, and trembling equally with shame and anger; for he felt that he was, at the same time, laughed at and menaced.

"It means," cried Charles IX., furious, and turning pale with intense rage, "that I will no longer have any Huguenots about me. Do you hear me, Henry?—Am I king? am I master?"

"Your majesty——"

"My majesty kills and massacres at this moment all that is not Catholic, at my pleasure. Are you Catholic?" exclaimed Charles, whose anger rose like an excited sea.

"Sire," replied Henry, "do you remember your own words, 'What matters the religion of those who serve me well!'"

"Ah! ah! ah!" cried Charles, bursting into a ferocious laugh; "you ask me if I remember my words, Henry! '*Verba volant,*' as my sister Margot says; and had not all those"—and he pointed to the city with his finger—

"served me well, also? Were they not brave in battle, wise in council, deeply devoted? They were all useful subjects—but they were Huguenots, and I want none but Catholics."

Henry remained silent.

"Well! do you understand me now, Harry?" asked Charles.

"I understand, sire."

"Well?"

"Well, sire! I do not see why the King of Navarre should not do what so many gentlemen and poor folk have done. For if they all die, poor unfortunates, it is because the same terms have been proposed to them which your majesty proposes to me, and they have refused, as I refuse."

Charles seized the arm of the young prince, and fixed on him a look whose vacancy suddenly changed into a fierce and savage scowl.

"What!" he said, "do you believe that I have taken the trouble to offer the alternative of the mass to those whose throats are being cut down there?"

"Sire," said Henry, disengaging his arm, "will you not die in the religion of your fathers?"

"Yes, *mordieu!* and thou?"

"Well, sire, I will do the same!" replied Henry.

Charles uttered a cry of fierce rage, and seized with trembling hand his arquebuss placed on the table. Henry, who, leaning against the tapestry, with the perspiration streaming from his brow, was yet, owing to his presence of mind, calm to all appearance, followed with the anxious amaze of a bird fascinated by a serpent every movement of the terrible king.

Charles cocked his arquebuss, and striking his foot with blind rage, cried, as he dazzled Henry's eyes with the polished barrel of the brandished weapon, "Will you accept the mass?"

Henry remained mute.

Charles IX. shook the vaults of the Louvre with the most terrible oath that ever issued from the lips of man, and grew more livid than before.

"Death, mass, or the bastille!" he cried, taking aim at the King of Navarre.

"Oh, sire!" exclaimed Henry, "will you kill me—me, your brother-in-law?"

Henry thus eluded, by his incomparable presence of mind, which was one of the strongest faculties of his organization, the answer which the king demanded, for doubtless had this reply been in the negative, Henry had been a dead man.

As immediately after the last paroxysms of rage, there is always the commencement of reaction, Charles IX. did not repeat the question he had addressed to the Prince of Navarre; and, after a moment's hesitation, during which he uttered a hoarse kind of growl, he turned towards the open window, and aimed at a man who was running along the quay in front.

"I must kill some one!" cried Charles IX., ghastly as a corpse, his eyes injected with blood; and firing as he spoke, he struck the man who was running.

Henry uttered a groan.

Then, animated by a frightful ardor. Charles loaded and fired his arquebuss without cessation, uttering cries of joy every time his aim was successful.

"It is all over with me!" said the King of Navarre to himself; "when he sees no one else to kill, he will kill me!"

"Well!" said a voice behind the princes, suddenly, "is it done?"

It was Catherine de Medicis, who had entered as the king fired his last shot.

"No, thousand thunders!" said the king, throwing his arquebuss on the floor. "No, the obstinate blockhead will not consent!"

Catherine made no reply. She turned slowly towards the part of the chamber in which Henry was, as motionless as one of the figures of the tapestry against which he was leaning. She then gave a glance to the king, which seemed to say:

"Then, why is he alive?"

"He lives, he lives!" murmured Charles IX, who perfectly understood the glance, and replied to it without hesitation—"he lives, because he is my relative."

Catherine smiled.

Henry saw the smile, and felt then assured that it was with Catherine he must struggle.

"Madame," he said to her, "all comes from you, I see very well, and nothing from my brother-in-law, Charles. You have laid the plan for drawing me into a snare. It was you who made your daughter the bait which was to destroy us all. It has been you who has separated me from my wife, that she might not see me killed before her eyes."

"Yes, but that shall not be!" cried another voice, breathless and impassioned, which Henry recognized in an instant, and made Charles start with surprise, and Catherine with rage.

"Marguerite!" exclaimed Henry.

"Margot!" said Charles IX.

"My daughter!" muttered Catherine.

"Sir," said Marguerite to Henry, "your last words were an accusation against me, and you were both right and wrong. Right, for I am the means by which they attempted to destroy you: wrong, for I did not know that you were going towards destruction. I myself, sir, owe my life to chance—to my mother's not thinking of me, perhaps; but as soon as I learned your danger I remembered my duty, and a wife's duty is to share the fortunes of her husband. If you are exiled, sir, I will be exiled too; if they imprison you, I will be your fellow-captive; if they kill you, I will also die."

And she extended her hand to her husband, which he eagerly seized, if not with love, at least with gratitude.

"Oh, my poor Margot!" said Charles, "you had much better desire him to become a Catholic!"

"Sire," replied Marguerite, with that lofty dignity which was so natural to her, "for your own sake, do not ask any prince of your house to commit a base action."

Catherine darted a significant glance at Charles.

"Brother," cried Marguerite, who, as well as Charles IX., understood the terrible dumb-show of Catherine, "remember, you made him my husband!"

Charles was for a time stupefied between the imperative look of Catherine and the supplicating regard of Marguerite, but after a pause, he said in a whisper to Catherine:

"Faith, madame, Margot is right, and Harry is my brother-in-law."

"Yes," was Catherine's reply, in a similar whisper to her son; "yes, but if he were not——"

CHAPTER XI.

THE HAWTHORN OF THE CEMETERY OF THE INNOCENTS.

When she had reached her own apartments, Marguerite vainly endeavored to divine the words which Catherine de Medicis had whispered to Charles IX., and which had cut short the terrible interview on which hung life and death.

A part of the morning was employed by her in attending to La Mole, and the other in trying to guess the enigma, which her mind could not discover.

The King of Navarre remained a prisoner in the Louvre, whilst the pursuit of the Huguenots was hotter than ever. To the terrible night had succeeded a day of massacre still more horrible. It was no longer the tocsin and bells that sounded, but the *Te Deum*, and the echoes of this joyous anthem, resounding in the midst of fire and slaughter, were perhaps more sad by the light of the sun than had been the knell of the previous night sounding in darkness. This was not all. Strange to say, a hawthorn-tree, which had blossomed in the spring, and which, according to custom, had lost its odorous flowers in the month of June, had reblossomed during the night, and the Catholics, who saw in this even a miracle, and who by rendering this miracle popular made the Deity their accomplice, went in procession, cross and banner at their head, to the Cemetery of the Innocents, where this hawthorn was blooming. This kind of assent from Heaven had redoubled the efforts of the assassins, and whilst the city continued to present in each street and thoroughfare a scene of desolation, the Louvre had become the common tomb for all Protestants who had been shut up there when the signal was given. The King of Navarre, the Prince de Condé, and la Mole, were the only survivors.

Assured as to La Mole, whose wounds were progressing well, Marguerite was occupied now with one sole idea, which was to save her husband's life, so pertinaciously threatened. No doubt, the first sentiment which actuated the wife was one of generous pity for a man for whom, as for the Béarnais, she had sworn, if not love, at least alliance; but there was, beside, another less pure sentiment which had penetrated the queen's heart.

Marguerite was ambitious, and had foreseen almost the certainty of royalty in her marriage with Henry de Bourbon, and if she lost him, it was not only a husband, but a throne she lost.

Whilst wrapped in her reflections, she heard a knock at the secret door. She started; for three persons only came by that door—the king, the queen-mother, and the Duke d'Alençon. She half opened the door of the cabinet, made a gesture of silence to Gillonne and La Mole, and then opened the door to her visitor.

It was the Duke d'Alençon. The young prince had disappeared since the evening. For a moment, Marguerite had had the idea of claiming his intercession for the King of Navarre, but a terrible idea restrained her. The marriage had taken place contrary to his wishes. François detested Henry, and had only evinced his neutrality towards the Béarnais, because he was convinced that Henry and his wife had remained strangers to each other. Marguerite therefore shuddered at perceiving the young prince more than she had shuddered at seeing the king, or even the queen-mother. D'Alençon was attired with his usual elegance. His clothes and linen gave forth those perfumes which Charles IX. despised, but of which the Dukes d'Anjou and d'Alençon made continual use.

On his entrance, he pressed his pale thin lips against the forehead of his sister. Then, sitting down, he began to relate to his sister the bloody particulars of the night: the lingering and terrible death of the admiral, the instantaneous death of Teligny, pierced by a ball. He paused and emphasised all the more horrid details of this night, with that love of blood peculiar to himself and his two brothers; and Marguerite did not interrupt him until he had finished.

"It was not to tell me this only," she then said, "that you came hither, brother?"

The Duke d'Alençon smiled.

"You have something else to say to me?"

"No," replied the duke; "I am waiting."

"Waiting! for what?"

"Did you not tell me, dearest Marguerite," said the duke, drawing his chair close up to that of his sister, "that this marriage with the King of Navarre was contracted against your will?"

"Yes, no doubt. I did not know the Prince of Béarn, when he was proposed to me as a husband."

"And after you knew him, did you not say that you experienced no love for him?"

"I said so, and it is true."

"Was it not your opinion that this marriage would make you miserable?"

"My dear François," said Marguerite, "when a marriage is not extremely happy, it is always excessively miserable."

"Well, then, my dear Marguerite, as I said to you—I am waiting."

"But for what are you waiting?"

"Until you display your joy!"

"What have I to be joyful for?"

"The unexpected occasion which offers itself for you to resume your liberty."

"My liberty?" replied Marguerite, who was resolved on allowing the prince to disclose all his thoughts.

"Yes; your liberty! You will now be separated from the King of Navarre."

"Separated!" said Marguerite, fastening her eyes on the young prince.

The Duke d'Alençon tried to sustain his sister's look, but his eyes soon sunk with embarrassment.

"Separated!" repeated Marguerite; "and how, brother? for I should like to comprehend all you mean, and by what method you propose to separate us?"

"Why," murmured the duke, "Henry is a Huguenot."

"No doubt; but he made no mystery of his religion, and they knew that when we were married."

"Yes; but since your marriage, sister," asked the duke, allowing, in spite of himself, a ray of joy to illumine his countenance; "what has been Henry's behavior?"

"Why, you know better than any one, François, for he has passed his days almost perpetually in your society, sometimes at the chase, sometimes at mall, sometimes at tennis."

"Yes, his days, no doubt," replied the duke; "his days—but his nights?"

Marguerite was silent; it was now her turn to cast down her eyes.

"His nights," repeated the Duke d'Alençon, "his nights?"

"Well," inquired Marguerite, feeling that it was requisite that she should say something in reply.

"Well, he passes them with Madame de Sauve!"

"How do you know that?" exclaimed Marguerite.

"I know it, because I had an interest in knowing it," replied the young prince, picking the embroidery of his sleeves.

Marguerite began to understand what Catherine had whispered to Charles, but affected to remain in ignorance.

"Why do you tell me this, brother?" she replied, with a well-affected air of melancholy; "was it for the sake of recalling to me that no one here loves me or clings to me, not even those whom nature has given to me as protectors, whom the Church has given me as my spouse?"

"You are unjust," said the Duke d'Alençon, drawing his chair still nearer to his sister, "I love you and protect you!"

"Brother," said Marguerite, looking steadfastly at him, "have you anything to say to me on the part of the queen-mother?"

"I! you mistake, sister. I swear to you—what can make you think that?"

"What can make me think that?—why, because you break the intimacy that binds you to my husband, you abandon the cause of the King of Navarre—an alliance with whom——"

"Has now become impossible, sister," interrupted the Duke d'Alençon.

"And wherefore?"

"Because the king has designs on your husband, and our mother has seen through them all. I allied myself to the Huguenots, because I believed the Huguenots were in favor; but now they kill the Huguenots, and in another week there will not remain fifty in the whole kingdom. I held out my hand to the King of Navarre, because he was your husband; but now he is not your husband, what can you say to that—you, who are not only the loveliest woman in France, but have the clearest head in the kingdom?"

"Why, I have to say," replied Marguerite, "that I know our brother Charles; I saw him yesterday in one of those fits of frenzy, every one of which shortens his life ten years. I have to say that these attacks are, unfortunately, very frequent, and that thus, in all probability, our brother Charles has not very long to live; and, finally, I have to say that the King of Poland is just dead, and the question of electing a prince of the house of France in his stead is much discussed; and when circumstances are thus, it is not the moment to abandon allies, who, in the moment of struggle, might support us with the strength of a nation and the power of a kingdom."

"And you!" exclaimed the duke, "do you not act much more treasonably to me in preferring a stranger to your own house?"

"Explain yourself, François!—in what have I acted treasonably to you?"

"You yesterday begged the life of the King of Navarre from King Charles."

"Well?" said Marguerite.

The duke rose hastily, paced round the chamber twice or thrice with a bewildered air.

"Adieu, sister!" he said at last. "You would not understand me; do not, therefore, complain of whatever may happen to you."

Marguerite turned pale, but remained fixed in her place. She saw the Duke d'Alençon go away, without making any attempt to detain him; but scarcely had he entered the corridor, than he returned.

"Sister Marguerite," he said, "I had forgotten one thing; that is, that to-morrow, at a certain hour, the King of Navarre will be dead."

Marguerite uttered a cry, for the idea that she was the instrument of assassination caused in her a fear she could not subdue.

"And you will not prevent this death," she said; "you will not save your best and most faithful ally?"

"Since yesterday, the King of Navarre is no longer my ally."

"Then who is?"

"M. de Guise. By destroying the Huguenots, M. de Guise has become the king of the Catholics."

"And is it a son of Henry II. who recognizes as his king a Duke of Lorraine?"

"You will not see things in a right light, Marguerite."

"I confess that I seek in vain to read your thoughts."

"Sister, you are of as good a house as the Princess de Porcian; De Guise is no more immortal than the King of Navarre. Well, Marguerite, suppose that Monsieur is elected King of Poland; well, I am King of France, and you, my sister, shall reign with me, and be queen of the Catholics."

Marguerite was overwhelmed at the depth of the views of this youth, whom no one at court even thought possessed of common understanding.

"There is only one thing which can prevent this capital plan from succeeding, brother," said she, rising as she spoke.

"And what is that?"

"That I do not love the Duke de Guise."

"And whom, then, do you love?"

"No one."

D'Alençon looked at Marguerite with the astonishment of a man, who, in his turn, does not comprehend, and left the apartment, pressing his cold hand on his forehead, which ached to bursting. Marguerite was alone and thoughtful, when Queen Catherine sent to know if she would accompany her in a pilgrimage to the hawthorn of the Cemetery of the Innocents.

She sent word, that if they would prepare a horse, she would most readily accompany their majesties.

A few minutes after, the page came to tell her that all was ready; and, after a sign to Gillonne to take care of La Mole, she went forth.

The king, the queen-mother, Tavannes, and the principal Catholics, were already mounted. Marguerite cast a rapid glance over the group, which was composed of twenty persons nearly, but the King of Navarre was not of the party.

Madame de Sauve was there, and she exchanged a glance with her, which convinced the Queen of Navarre that her husband's mistress had something to tell her.

As they proceeded, the people shouted and cried, "Vive le roi! Vive la messe! Mort aux Huguenots!"

When they reached the top of the Rue des Prouvelles, they met some men who were dragging a carcass without a head. It was that of the admiral. The men were going to hang it by the feet at Montfaucon.

They entered the Cemetery of Saint Innocents, and the clergy, forewarned of the visit of the king and the queen-mother, awaited their majesties to harangue them.

Madame de Sauve profited by a moment when Catherine was listening to the discourse that was being made, to approach the Queen of Navarre, and beg leave to kiss her hand. Marguerite extended her arm towards her, and Madame de Sauve, as she kissed the queen's hand, secretly put a small piece of paper up her sleeve.

Quick and well managed as was Madame de Sauve's proceeding, yet Catherine perceived it, and turned round at the moment when the maid of honor was kissing Marguerite's hand.

The two women saw that look, which penetrated them like lightning, but both remained unmoved ; only Madame de Sauve left Marguerite, and resumed her place near Catherine.

When the address was finished, Catherine made a gesture, smilingly, to the Queen of Navarre, who went towards her.

"Eh, my daughter," said the queen-mother, in her Italian patois, "are you, then, on such intimate terms with Madame de Sauve ?"

Marguerite smiled in turn, and gave to her lovely countenance the bitterest expression she could, as she said :

"Yes, mother ; the serpent came to bite my hand !"

"Ah, ah !" replied Catherine, with a smile, "you are jealous, I think !"

"You mistake, madame," replied Marguerite ; "I am no more jealous of the King of Navarre than the King of Navarre is jealous of me, only I know how to distinguish my friends from my enemies. I like those who like me, and detest those who hate me. If not, madame, should I be your daughter ?"

Catherine smiled so as to make Marguerite understand that, if she had had any suspicion, it had vanished.

At this moment arrived other pilgrims. The Duke de Guise came with a troop of gentlemen all warm still with recent carnage. They escorted a litter, richly covered with tapestry, which stopped in front of the king.

"The Duchess de Nevers!" cried Charles IX., "let that lovely and pure Catholic come and receive our compliments. Why, they tell me, cousin, that from your window you made war on the Huguenots, and killed one with a stone."

The Duchess de Nevers blushed exceedingly.

"Sire," she said, in a low tone, and kneeling before the king, "it was, on the contrary, a wounded Catholic, whom I had the good fortune to rescue."

"Good—good, my cousin! there are two ways of serving me."

During this time, the people again cried, "Vive le roi! Vive le Duc de Guise! Vive la messe!"

"Do you return to the Louvre with us, Henriette?" inquired the queen-mother of the lovely duchess.

Marguerite touched her friend on the elbow, who, understanding the sign, replied:

"No, madame, unless your majesty desire it; for I have business in the city with her majesty the Queen of Navarre."

"And what are you going to do together?" inquired Catherine.

"To see some very rare and curious Greek books found at an old Protestant pastor's, and which have been taken to the Tower of Saint Jacques la Boucherie," replied Marguerite.

"You would do much better to see the last Huguenot flung from the top of Pont-aux-Meuniers into the Seine," said Charles IX.; "that is the place for all good Frenchmen."

"We will go, if it be your majesty's desire," replied the Duchess de Nevers.

Catherine cast a look of distrust on the two young women. Marguerite, on the watch, remarked it, and turning herself round uneasily, looked about her.

This assumed or real disquietude did not escape Catherine.

"What are you looking for?"

"I am seeking—I do not see——" she replied.

"Whom are you seeking?"

"Madame de Sauve," said Marguerite; "she must have returned to the Louvre."

"Did I not say you were jealous!" said Catherine, in her daughter's ear. "Oh, *bestia!* Come, come, Henriette," she added, "begone, and take the Queen of Navarre with you."

Marguerite pretended to look still about her; then, turning towards her friend, she said, in a whisper:

"Take me away quickly; I have matters of great importance to say to you."

The duchess saluted the king and queen-mother respectfully, and then, inclining before the Queen of Navarre:

"Will your majesty condescend to come into my litter?"

"Willingly, only you will have to take me back to the Louvre."

"My litter, like my servants and myself, are at your majesty's orders."

Queen Marguerite entered the litter, whilst Catherine and her gentlemen returned to the Louvre, and, during the route, she spoke incessantly to the king, pointing several times to Madame de Sauve; and at each time the king laughed—as Charles IX. did laugh—that is, with a laugh more sinister than a threat.

As to Marguerite, as soon as she felt the litter in motion, and had no longer to fear the searching gaze of Catherine, she quickly drew from her sleeve the note of Madame de Sauve and read as follows:

"I have received orders to send to-night to the King of Navarre two keys: one is that of the chamber in which he is shut up, and the other is the key of my chamber; when once in my apartment, I am enjoined to keep him there until six o'clock in the morning.

"Let your majesty reflect—let your majesty decide. Let your majesty esteem my life as nothing."

"There is now no doubt," murmured Marguerite; "and the poor woman is the tool of which they wish to make use to destroy us all. But we will see if the Queen Margot, as my brother Charles calls me, is so easily to be made a nun of."

"And what is that letter about?" inquired the Duchess de Nevers.

"Ah! duchess, I have so many things to say to you!" replied Marguerite, tearing the note into a thousand bits, and scattering them to the winds.

CHAPTER XII.

MUTUAL CONFIDENCE.

"AND, first, where are we going?" asked Marguerite; "not to the Pont des Meuniers, I suppose—I have seen enough slaughter since yesterday."

"I have taken the liberty to conduct your majesty——"

"First and foremost, my majesty requests you to forget my majesty; you were taking me——"

"To the Hôtel de Guise, unless you decide otherwise."

"No, no, let us go there, Henriette; the duke and your husband are not there."

"Oh, no," cried the duchess, her bright eyes sparkling with joy; "no: neither my husband, my brother-in-law, nor any one else. I am free—free as air—free as a bird; free, my queen! Do you understand the happiness there is in that word?—free! I come, I go, I command. Ah, poor queen, you are not free—you sigh."

"You come, you go, you command. Is that all? Is that all the use of liberty?"

"Your majesty promised me that you would begin our mutual confidence."

"Again, 'your majesty!' I shall be angry soon, Henriette. Have you forgotten our agreement?"

"No; your respectful servant in public—in private, your madcap confidante. Is it not so, Marguerite?"

"Yes, yes," said the queen, smiling.

"No family rivalry, no treachery in love; all fair and open. An offensive and defensive alliance, for the sole purpose of seeking, and, if we can, seizing, that ephemeral thing called happiness."

"Just so, duchess. Let us again seal the compact with a kiss."

And the two beautiful women, the one so roseate, so fair, so animated, the other so pale, so full of melancholy, united their lips as they had united their thoughts.

"What is there new?" asked the duchess, fixing her eyes upon Marguerite.

"Everything is new since the last two days, is it not?"

"Oh, I am speaking of love, not of politics. When we are as old as your mother, Catherine, we will think of politics, but at twenty, let us think of something else. Tell me, are you *really* married?"

"To whom?"

"Ah, you reassure me."

"Well, Henriette, that which reassures you alarms me. Duchess, I must be married."

"When?"

"To-morrow."

"Oh, pauvre Marguerite! and is it essential?"

"Absolutely."

"*Mordi!* as an acquaintance of mine says, this is very sad."

"You know some one who says *mordi?*" asked Marguerite, with a smile.

"Yes."

"And who is this acquaintance?"

"You ask questions instead of answering them. Finish your story, and then I will begin."

"In two words, it is this. The King of Navarre is in love, and not with me; I am not in love, and certainly not with him; yet we must both of us change, or seem to change, before to-morrow."

"Well, do you change, and he will soon do the same."

"That is quite impossible, for I am less than ever inclined to change."

"Only with respect to your husband, I hope."

"Henriette, I have a scruple."

"A scruple! about what?"

"Of religion. Do you make any difference between Huguenots and Catholics?"

"In politics?"

"Yes."

"Of course."

"And in love?"

"*Ma chère!*" we women are such heathens, that we admit every kind of sect, and recognize many gods."

"In one, eh?"

"Yes," replied the duchess, her eyes sparkling; "he who is called *Eros, Cupido, Amor*. He who has a quiver on his back, wings on his shoulders, and a bandage over his eyes. *Mordi, vive la devotion!*"

"You have a peculiar method of praying; you throw stones on the Huguenots."

"Let them talk. Ah, Marguerite! how the finest ideas, the noblest actions, are spoilt in passing through the mouths of the vulgar."

"The vulgar! why, it was my brother Charles who congratulated you on your exploits."

"Your brother Charles is a mighty hunter, who blows the horn all day, which makes him very thin. I reject his compliments; besides, I gave him his answer. Did you hear what I said?"

"No; you spoke so low."

"So much the better. I shall have more news to tell you. Now, then, finish your story, Marguerite."

"Why—why——"

"Well."

"Why, in truth," said the queen, laughing, "if the stone my brother spoke of be a fact, I should not care to tell you my story at all."

"Ah!" cried Henriette, "you have chosen a Huguenot. Well, to reassure your conscience, I promise you to choose one myself on the first opportunity."

"Ah, you have chosen a Catholic, then."

"*Mordi!*" replied the duchess.

"I see, I see."

"And what is this Huguenot of yours?

"I have not adopted him. He is nothing, and probably never will be anything to me."

"But what sort is he? You can tell me that; you know how curious I am about these matters."

"A poor young fellow, beautiful as Benvenuto Cellini's Nisus,—and who took refuge in my apartment."

"Oh, oh!—of course without any suggestion on your part?"

"Do not laugh, Henriette; at this very moment he is between life and death."

"He is ill, then?"

"He is dangerously wounded."

"A wounded Huguenot is very disagreeable, especially in these times; and what have you done with this wounded Huguenot, who is not, and never will be, anything to you?"

"He is hid in my cabinet: I would save him."

"He is young, handsome, and wounded—you hide him and wish to save him. He will be very ungrateful if he do not show himself very grateful."

"He is already, I fear, more grateful than I could wish."

"And this poor young man interests you?"

"Only for humanity's sake."

"Ah! humanity's precisely the virtue that undoes all us women."

"Yes; and you see the king, the Duke d'Alençon, my mother, or even my husband, may at any moment enter the apartment——"

"Ay, you want me to hide your Huguenot so long as he is ill, upon condition I send him back to you when he is cured?"

"No," said Marguerite, "I do not look forward so far; but if you could conceal the poor fellow—if you could preserve the life I have saved, I should be most grateful. You are free at the Hôtel de Guise; you have no one to watch you; besides, behind your chamber there is a cabinet like mine, into which no one is entitled to enter; lend me this cabinet for my Huguenot, and when he is cured, open the cage, and let the bird fly away."

"There is only one difficulty, my dear; the cage is already occupied."

"What, have *you* also saved somebody?"

"That is exactly what I answered your brother with."

"Ah, ah! that's why you spoke so low that I could not hear you."

"Listen, Marguerite: the story is no less poetical and romantic than yours. After I had left you six of my guards, I returned with the rest to the Hôtel de Guise. I was looking at a house that was burning opposite, when I heard the voices of men swearing, and of women crying. I went out on the balcony, and saw, in the thickest of the fight, a complete hero—I like heroes—an Ajax-Telamon; I stood trembling at every blow aimed at him, and at every thrust he dealt, until, all of a sudden, my hero disappeared."

"How?"

"Struck down by a stone an old woman threw at him. Then, like the son of Crœsus, I found my voice, and screamed, 'Help! help!' My guards went out, lifted him up, and bore him to my apartment."

"Alas! I can the better understand this history, that it is so nearly my own."

"With this difference, that as I have served the king and the Catholic religion in succoring him, I have no reason to send M. Annibal de Coconnas away."

"His name is Annibal de Coconnas!" said Marguerite, laughing.

"A terrible name, is it not? Well, he who bears it is worthy of it. Put on your mask, for we are now at the hotel."

"Why put on my mask?"

"Because I wish to show you my hero."

"Is he handsome?"

"He seemed so to me during the conflict. In the morning, I must confess he did not look quite so well as at night, by the light of the flames. But I do not think you will find great fault with him."

"Then my protégé is rejected at the Hôtel de Guise; I am sorry for it, for that is the last place that they would look for a Huguenot in."

"Oh, no; your Huguenot shall come; he shall have one corner of the cabinet, and Annibal the other."

"But when they recognize each other they will fight."

"Oh, there is no danger. M. de Coconnas has had a cut down the face that prevents him from seeing very well; your Huguenot is wounded in the chest; and, besides, you have only to tell him to be silent on the subject of religion, and all will go well."

"So be it."

"It's a bargain: and now let us go in."

"Thanks," said Marguerite, pressing her friend's hand.

"Here, madame," said the duchess, "you are again 'your majesty,' suffer me, then, to do the honors of the Hôtel de Guise fittingly for the Queen of Navarre."

And the duchess, descending from the litter, almost bent her knee as she aided Marguerite to alight; then pointing to the gate guarded by two soldiers, arquebuss in hand, she followed the queen respectfully into the hotel.

Arrived at her chamber, the duchess closed the door, and, calling to her waiting-woman, a thorough Sicilian, said to her in Italian, "How is M. le Comte?"

"Better and better," replied she.

"What is he doing?"

"At this moment, madame, he is taking some refreshment."

"It is always a good sign," said Marguerite, "when the appetite returns."

"Ah, I forgot you were a pupil of Ambroise Paré. Leave us, Mica."

"Why do you send her away?"

"That she may be on the watch."

"Now," said the duchess, "will you go in to see him, or shall I send for him here?"

"Neither the one nor the other. I wish to see him without his seeing me."

"What matters it? You have your mask."

"He may recognize me by my hands, my hair, my ring."

"How cautious we are, since we've been married!"

Marguerite smiled.

"Well," said the duchess, "I see only one way."

"What is that?"

"To look through the keyhole."

"Take me to the door, then."

The duchess led Marguerite to a door covered with tapestry; raising this, she applied her eye to the keyhole.

"'Tis as you could wish; he is sitting at table, with his face turned towards us."

The queen took her friend's place; Coconnas was, as the duchess had said, sitting at a table well covered, and, despite his wounds, was doing ample justice to the good things before him.

"Ah, *mon Dieu!*" cried Marguerite.

"What is the matter?" asked the duchess.

"Impossible!—no!—yes!—'tis he himself!"

"Who?"

"Chut," said Marguerite; "'tis he who pursued my Huguenot into my apartment, and would have killed him in my arms! Oh, Henriette, how fortunate he did not see me."

"Well, then, you have seen him in battle; is he not handsome."

"I do not know," said Marguerite, "for I was looking at him he pursued."

"What is his name?"

"You will not mention it before the count?"

"No!"

"Lerac de la Mole."

"And now what do you think of my Annibal?"

"Of La Mole?"

"Of Coconnas?"

"*Ma foi!*" said Marguerite, "I confess I think——"

She stopped.

"Come, come," said the duchess, "I see you cannot forgive his wounding your Huguenot."

"Why, so far," said Marguerite, smiling, "my Huguenot owes him nothing; the cut he gave him on his face——"

"They are quits, then, and we can reconcile them. Send me your wounded man."

"Not now—by and by."

"When?"

"When you have found yours a fresh chamber."

"Which?"

Marguerite looked meaningly at her friend, who, after a moment's silence, laughed.

"So be it," said the duchess; "alliance firmer than ever."

"Friendship ever sincere!"

"And the word, in case we need each other."

"The triple name of your triple god, '*Eros, Cupido, Amor.*'"

And the two princesses separated after one more embrace, and pressing each other's hand for the twentieth time.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW THERE ARE KEYS THAT OPEN DOORS THEY ARE NOT MEANT FOR.

The Queen of Navarre, on her return to the Louvre, found Gillonne in great excitement. Madame de Sauve had come in her absence. She had brought a key sent her by the queen-mother. It was the key of the chamber in which Henry was confined. It was evident that the queen-mother wished the Béarnais to pass the night in Madame de Sauve's apartment.

Marguerite took the key, and turned it and turned it; she made Gillonne repeat Madame de Sauve's every word, weighed them, letter by letter, and at length thought she detected Catherine's plan.

She took pen and ink, and wrote:

"Instead of going to Madame de Sauve to-night, come to the Queen of Navarre.—MARGUERITE."

She rolled up the paper, put it in the pipe of the key and ordered Gillonne, as soon as it was dark, to slip the key under the king's door.

This done, Marguerite thought of the wounded man, closed all the doors, entered the cabinet, and, to her great surprise, found La Mole dressed in all his clothes, torn and blood-stained as they were.

On seeing her he strove to rise, but could not stand, and fell back upon the sofa which had served for his bed.

"What is the matter, sir?" asked Marguerite; "and why do you thus disobey the orders of your physician? I recommended you repose, and instead of following my advice you do just the contrary."

"Oh, madame," said Gillonne, "it is not my fault; I have entreated M. le Comte not to commit this folly, but he declares that nothing shall keep him any longer at the Louvre."

"Quit the Louvre!" said Marguerite, astonished. "Why, it is impossible—you can scarcely stand; you are pale and weak; your knees tremble. Only a few hours ago, the wound in your shoulder still bled."

"Madame," said the young man, "as earnestly as I thanked your majesty for having saved my life, as earnestly do I pray you to suffer me to depart."

"I scarcely know what to call such a resolution," said Marguerite; "it is worse than ingratitude."

"Oh," cried La Mole, clasping his hands, "think me not ungrateful; my gratitude will cease only with my life."

"It will not last long, then," said Marguerite, moved at these words, the sincerity of which it was impossible to doubt; "for your wounds will open, and you will die from loss of blood, or you will be recognized for a Huguenot, and killed, ere you advance fifty yards in the street."

"I must, nevertheless, quit the Louvre," murmured La Mole.

"Must," returned Marguerite, fixing her full speaking gaze upon him; "ah, yes: forgive me, I understand; doubtless, there is one who anxiously awaits you. I appreciate the feeling, and reproach myself for not having before thought of it; I should have attended to your mind as well as to your body."

"Madame," said La Mole, "you are mistaken—I am well-nigh alone in the world, and altogether so in Paris. My pursuer is the first man I have spoken to in this city; your majesty the first lady who has addressed me."

"Then," said Marguerite, "why would you go?"

"Because," replied La Mole, "last night you had no rest, and that to-night——"

Margaret blushed.

"Gillonne," said she, "it is time to take that key to the King of Navarre."

Gillonne smiled, and left the room.

"But," continued Marguerite, "if you are alone, without friends, what will you do?"

"Madame, I soon shall have friends, for whilst I was pursued, I saw the form of my mother guiding me to the Louvre, and I vowed, if I were spared, to abjure. Heaven has done more than save my life—it has sent me one of its angels to make life dear to me."

"But you cannot walk; you will faint before you have gone a hundred yards."

"Madame, I have tried to walk in the cabinet; I do so slowly, it is true, but once outside the Louvre, I will take my chance."

Marguerite leaned her head on her hand, and reflected for an instant.

"And the King of Navarre," said she, emphatically, "you do not speak of him? In changing your religion, have you also changed your desire to enter his service?"

"Madame," returned La Mole, "I know that his majesty runs a great risk at present, and that all your influence will scarce suffice to save him."

"What!" said Marguerite, "how know you that?"

"Madame," returned La Mole, after some hesitation, "one can hear everything in this cabinet."

"'Tis true," said Marguerite to herself; "M. de Guise told me so before."

"Well," added she, aloud, "what have you heard?"

"In the first place, the conversation between your majesty and your brother."

"With François?" said Marguerite.

"With the Duke d'Alençon; and since your departure, that of Gillonne and Madame de Sauve."

"And it is these two conversations——"

"Yes, madame; married scarcely a week, you love your husband; to-night he will come, in his turn, in the same way that the Duke d'Alençon and Madame de Sauve have come, he will discourse with you of his affairs: I do not wish to hear; I might be indiscreet—I will give myself no chance of being so."

At the last words, and their manner, Marguerite comprehended all.

"Ah!" said she, "you have heard everything that has been said in this chamber?"

"Yes, madame."

These words were uttered in a sigh.

"And you wish to depart to-night, to avoid hearing any more?"

"This moment, if it please your majesty."

"Poor fellow!" said Marguerite, with an accent of tender pity.

Astonished at so gentle an apostrophe, when he expected an abrupt reply, La Mole lifted his head timidly—his eyes encountered those of the queen, and remained immovable before her penetrating glance.

"You are, then, incapable of keeping a secret, M. de la Mole?" said the queen, who, seated in a large chair, could watch La Mole's face whilst her own remained in the shadow.

"Madame," said La Mole, "I distrust myself, and the happiness of another gives me pain."

"The happiness of whom? Ah, yes—of the King of Navarre! Poor Henry!"

"You see," cried La Mole, passionately, "he is happy."

"Happy?"

"Yes, for your majesty pities him."

Marguerite played with the golden tassels of her alms-purse.

"You will not, then, see the King of Navarre—you are quite resolved?"

"I fear I should be troublesome to his majesty at present."

"But the Duke d'Alençon, my brother?"

"Oh, no!" cried La Mole, "the Duke d'Alençon even still less than the King of Navarre."

"Why so?" asked Marguerite.

"Because, although I am already too bad a Huguenot to be a faithful servant of the King of Navarre, I am not a sufficiently good Catholic to be friends with the Duke d'Alençon and M. de Guise."

Marguerite cast down her eyes; that which La Mole had said, struck to her very heart.

At this instant Gillonne returned; Marguerite, with a look, interrogated her, and Gillonne, in the same manner, answered in the affirmative; the King of Navarre had received the key.

Marguerite turned her eyes towards La Mole, who stood, his head drooping on his breast, sad, pale, grief-laden, as one suffering alike in mind and in body.

"M. de la Mole is so proud," said she, "that I hesitate to make him an offer I fear he will repel."

La Mole rose, and advanced a step towards Marguerite, but a feeling of faintness came over him, and he caught at a table to save himself from falling.

"You see, monsieur," cried Marguerite, supporting him in her arms, "that I am still necessary to you."

"Oh, yes!" murmured La Mole, "as the air I breathe—as the light of heaven."

At this moment three knocks were heard at the outer door.

"Do you hear, madame?" cried Gillonne, alarmed.

"Already!" exclaimed Marguerite.

"Shall I open?"

"Wait! it is the King of Navarre, perhaps."

"Oh, madame!" cried La Mole, recalled to himself by these words, which the queen hoped had been heard by Gillonne alone, "I implore—I entreat you, let me depart. Oh! you do not answer. I will tell you all, and then you will drive me away, I hope."

"Be silent," said Marguerite, who found an indescribable charm in the reproaches of the young man; "be silent."

"Madame," replied La Mole, who did not find that anger he expected in the voice of the queen, "madame, I tell you again, I hear everything from this cabinet. Oh, do not make me perish by tortures more cruel than the executioner could inflict——"

"Silence! silence!" said Marguerite.

"Oh, you are merciless! you will not understand me. Know, then, that I——"

"Silence! I tell you," said Marguerite, placing on his mouth her white and perfumed hand, which he seized, and pressed eagerly to his lips.

"But——" murmured he.

"Be silent, child!—who is this rebel that refuses to obey his queen?"

Then, hastily quitting the cabinet, she pressed her hand to her heart, as if to control it.

"And now, open, Gillonne."

Gillonne left the apartment, and an instant after the fine, intellectual, but at present somewhat anxious countenance of the King of Navarre appeared.

"You have sent for me, madame?"

"Yes, sir. Your majesty received my letter?"

"And not without some surprise, I confess," said Henry, looking round with distrust, which, however, almost instantly vanished from his mind.

"And not without disquiet," added Marguerite.

"I confess it! But still, surrounded as I am by deadly enemies, by friends still more dangerous, perhaps, than my open foes, I recollected that one evening I had seen a noble generosity radiant in your eyes—'twas the night of our marriage: that one other evening I had seen high courage glance from them—'twas yesterday, the day fixed for my death."

"Well, monsieur!" said Marguerite, smiling, whilst Henry seemed striving to read her heart.

"Well, madame," returned the king, "thinking of these things, I said to myself, when I read your letter: Without friends, for he is a disarmed prisoner, the King of Navarre has but one means of dying nobly, of dying a death that will be recorded in history. It is to die betrayed by his wife; and I am come——"

"Sir," replied Marguerite, "you will change your tone when you learn that all this is the work of a woman who loves you, and whom you love."

Henry started back at these words, and his piercing gray eyes were fixed on the queen, with earnest curiosity.

"Oh, reassure yourself, sir," said the queen, smiling; "I am not that person."

"But, madame," said Henry, "*you* sent me this key, and this is *your* writing."

"It is my writing, I confess; but the key is a different matter: content you with knowing that it has passed through the hands of four women before it reached you."

"Of four women?"

"Yes," said Marguerite; "those of Queen Catherine, Madame de Sauve, Gillonne, and myself."

Henry pondered over this enigma.

"Let us speak plainly," said Marguerite. "Report says your majesty has consented to abjure. Is that true?"

"Report is somewhat premature; I have not yet consented."

"But your mind is made up?"

"That is to say, I am deliberating. At twenty, and almost a king, there are many things that are well worth a mass."

"Life, for instance!"

Henry smiled.

"You do not tell me *all*," said the queen.

"I have reservations for my allies; and you know we are but allies as yet; if indeed, you were both my ally and——"

"And your wife, sir?"

"*Ma foi!* yes, and my wife——"

"What then?"

"Why, then, it might be different, and I perhaps might resolve to remain king of the Huguenots, as they call me. But as it is, I must be content to live."

Marguerite looked at her husband in so peculiar a manner, that it would have awakened suspicion in a less acute mind than his.

"And are you quite sure of retaining even that?" asked she.

"Why, almost; but, you know, in this world, nothing is certain."

"Truly, your majesty shows such moderation, such disinterestedness, that after having renounced your crown, your religion, you may be expected to satisfy the hopes of some people, and renounce your alliance with a daughter of France!"

There was a significance in these words that sent a thrill through Henry's whole frame: repressing the emotion, he said:

"Recollect, madame, that at this moment I am not my own master: I shall therefore do what the King of France orders me. As to myself, were I consulted the least in the world on this question, affecting as it does my throne, my honor, and my life, rather than build my future hopes on this forced marriage of ours, I would enter a cloister or turn gamekeeper."

This calm resignation, this renunciation of the world, alarmed Marguerite. She thought, perhaps this rupture of the marriage had been arranged between Charles IX., Catherine, and her husband, and the young queen felt her ambition attacked.

"Your majesty," said Marguerite, with a sort of disdainful raillery, "has no confidence in the star that shines over the head of every king!"

"Ah," said Henry, "I cannot see mine; it is hidden by the storm that now threatens me!"

"And suppose the breath of a woman were to dispel this threatened tempest, and make the star reappear, brilliant as ever?"

"'Twere difficult."

"Do you deny the existence of this woman?"

"No, I deny her power."

"You mean her will."

"I said her power, and I repeat her power. A woman is only powerful when love and interest are combined within her in equal degrees: if either sentiment predominates, she is, like Achilles, vulnerable; and, for the woman in question, if I mistake not, I cannot rely on her love."

Marguerite made no reply.

"Listen," said Henry. "At the last stroke of the bell of St.-Germain-l'Auxerrois, you most likely thought of regaining your liberty, sacrificed to the interests of your party. For myself, I thought of saving my life: that was the essential point. We lose Navarre, indeed; but what is that compared with your being enabled to speak aloud in your chamber, which you dared not do when you had some one listening to you in yonder cabinet?"

Marguerite could not refrain from smiling. The king rose and prepared to seek his own apartment; for it was eleven, and everybody at the Louvre was, or seemed to be, asleep.

Henry advanced towards the door, then, as if suddenly recollecting the motive of his visit:

"Apropos, madame!" said he. "Had you not something to communicate to me? or did you desire to give me an opportunity of thanking you for having saved my life? You came, I confess, like a goddess of antiquity, just in time to save me."

"What!" exclaimed Marguerite, seizing her husband's arm; "do you not see that nothing is saved, neither your liberty, your crown, nor your life? Infatuated Henry! Did you, then, see nothing in my letter but an amorous rendezvous?"

"I confess, madame," said Henry, all astonishment; "I confess——"

Marguerite shrugged her shoulders contemptuously.

At this instant a strange sound was heard, like a sharp scratching at the secret door.

Marguerite led the king thither.

"Listen," said she.

"The queen-mother is leaving her apartments," said a trembling voice outside, which Henry instantly recognized as that of Madame de Sauve.

"Where is she going?" asked Marguerite.

"She is coming to your majesty."

And then the rustling of silk showed that Madame de Sauve was hastening rapidly away.

"Oh, oh!" said Henry.

"I was sure of this," said Marguerite.

"And I," replied Henry, "feared it, as this will prove."

And half opening his doublet of black velvet, he showed the queen that he had beneath it a shirt of mail, and a long Milan poniard, which instantly glittered in his hand.

"They are needless," cried Marguerite, "Quick, quick, sir! conceal that dagger; 'tis the queen-mother, indeed, but the queen-mother only."

"Yet——"

"Silence!—I hear her."

And she whispered something in Henry's ear, who instantly hid himself behind the curtains of the bed.

Marguerite sprang into the cabinet, where La Mole awaited her, and pressing his hand in the darkness—"Silence," said she, approaching her lips so near that he felt her breath; "silence!"

Then, returning to her chamber, she tore off her head-dress, cut the lace of her dress with her poniard, and sprang into bed. It was time—the key turned in the lock. Catherine had a key for every door in the Louvre.

"Who is there?" cried Marguerite, as Catherine placed on guard at the door the four gentlemen by whom she was attended.

And, as if frightened by this intrusion into her chamber, Marguerite sprang out of bed in a white dressing-gown, and then, seeming to recognize Catherine, came to kiss her hand with so well feigned a surprise that the wily Florentine herself was deceived.

CHAPTER XIV.

CATHERINE AND MARGUERITE.

The queen-mother surveyed the chamber with eager and curious eyes; but the sight of Marguerite's velvet slippers at the foot of the bed, her vestments thrown negligently upon the chairs, joined to the well-feigned drowsiness with which she endeavored to open her eyes, convinced Catherine that she had really roused her daughter from her slumbers.

Smiling, therefore, the self-complacent smile of one whose plan of attack has been successful, she drew a chair towards her, saying:

"Let us sit down, my child, and have a little talk together."

"I am all attention, madame."

"It is time," said Catherine, shutting her eyes and speaking with that slowness peculiar to persons of great reflection or equal dissimulation—"it is time, I say, my daughter, that you should know how ardently your brother and myself desire to see you happy."

This was a somewhat alarming exordium for those who were acquainted with Catherine's real disposition.

"What can she be about to say?" thought Marguerite.

"Certainly," continued the Florentine, "in marrying you, we fulfilled one of those acts of policy frequently peremptorily demanded for the interest of the kingdom and those who govern it; but I must honestly confess to you, my poor child, that we had no expectation that the indifference manifested by the King of Navarre for one so young, so lovely and fascinating as yourself, would have been so obstinately persisted in."

Marguerite arose, and folding her robe de chambre around her, curtseyed with ceremonious respect to her mother.

"I have heard to-night only (otherwise I should have paid you an earlier visit) that your husband is far from showing you those attentions you have a right to claim, not merely as a beautiful woman, but as a princess of France."

Marguerite gently sighed, and Catherine, encouraged by this mute approval, proceeded:

"I am even assured the King of Navarre has a *liaison* with one of my maids of honor, and that he openly avows his disgraceful passion for her. Now, that he should despise the affection of the superior being we have bestowed upon him is unfortunately one of those evils which, powerful as we are, we have no means of remedying; although the meanest gentleman of our court would quickly demand satisfaction for so great an insult."

Marguerite's eyes sought the ground. Her mother continued:

"For some time past, my daughter, I have been well assured by your red and swollen eyes, as well as the bitterness of your sallies against Madame de Sauve, that try as you would, your poor wounded heart is not content to bleed and break in silent sorrow."

Marguerite started—a slight movement shook the curtains of the bed, but, fortunately, it passed unperceived by Catherine.

"Knowing all this, my beloved child," said she, with increased gentleness and affection, "it follows, as a matter of course, that a tender parent would seek to apply healing balm to the wound your heart has received. Have not those, therefore who, hoping to secure your happiness, dictated your marriage, but who, now, to their deep regret, discover that the obscure coarse-minded boor on whom they bestowed your hand neglects your beauty and despises your charms, and awaits but the first favorable chance of separating himself from our family, and thrusting you from his house—have not, I ask you, those same kind and watchful friends the right of securing your interest by entirely dividing them from his, so that your future prospects may offer a vista of greatness better suited to your illustrious descent and surpassing merits?"

"I beseech you, madame," replied Marguerite, "to pardon my presumption, in venturing to remark (after observations so replete with maternal love, and so calculated to fill me with joy and pride, as those you have just uttered), that after all your majesty has so ably advanced, the King of Navarre is my husband."

Catherine started with rage—then drawing closer to Marguerite she said: "He your husband? Do the few words pronounced over you by a priest warrant your styling him your husband? Ah! my child! such a state of things is a desecration, not a consecration of the marriage ceremony. Were you Madame de Sauve, indeed, you might make that assertion. But, wholly contrary to our expectations, directly we bestowed your hand on Henry of Navarre, he seemed more than indifferent towards you; permitting you, indeed, to hold the empty title of wife, while another engrossed his time and affections. Come with me. At this very moment, even," said Catherine, raising her voice: "this key opens the door of Madame de Sauve's apartment—accompany me thither, and you will see——"

"Oh, not so loud, madame!—not so loud, I beseech you!" said Marguerite; "for not only are you mistaken, but——"

"But, what?"

"I fear you will awaken my husband!"

As she said these words, Marguerite gracefully arose, her white dress fluttering loosely around her, while the large open sleeves displayed her matchless hand and arm; carrying one of the rose-colored tapers towards the bed, she gently drew back the curtain, and smiling significantly at her mother, pointed to the King of Navarre, who, stretched in easy negligence upon the couch, seemed buried in profound repose.

Pale and wonder-stricken, her body thrown back as though to avoid some abyss that had opened at her feet, Catherine uttered not a cry, but a kind of savage yell.

"You perceive, madame," said Marguerite, "you were misinformed."

Catherine alternately gazed from her daughter to the sleeping king, and again scrutinized the features of Marguerite; but the countenance of the latter bore unshrinkingly the searching glances of the queen-mother, who bit her thin lips with impotent rage at finding herself thus baffled. After permitting Catherine to contemplate a picture as hateful to her as the head of Medusa, Marguerite let fall the curtain, and walking on tip-toe back to her chair, resumed her place beside Catherine, saying, "What is your opinion at present, madame?"

The Florentine again fixed her piercing looks on Marguerite, as though she would read her very thoughts; but baffled and disconcerted by the calm placidity of her daughter's face, she rose in deep and concentrated fury, and merely replying, "I have no further opinion than that already expressed!" hastened precipitately from the apartment.

No sooner had the sound of her departing footsteps died away in the vast corridor, than the bed-curtains opened a second time, and Henry, with sparkling eye, trembling hand, and panting breath, sprung to Marguerite's feet; he had hastily thrown off his velvet pourpoint, and appeared merely in his nether garments and his coat of mail. Amid all her alarm and agitation, Marguerite could not restrain a hearty laugh at the singular costume adopted by a recently made husband to pay a visit to his bride's chamber; while, at the same time, she kindly and warmly pressed the hand of him she had so ably assisted.

"Ah, madame! ah, Marguerite!" exclaimed the king, "how shall I ever repay your goodness?"

"Sir!" replied Marguerite, gently retreating from the warmth of his gratitude, "have you forgotten that an individual to whom you owe your life is at this moment in dire uneasiness on your account? Madame de Sauve," added she, in a lower tone, "has forgotten her jealousy in sending you to me; and to that sacrifice she may probably have to add her life, for no one knows better than yourself how terrible is the anger of my mother."

Henry shuddered; and rising, was about to quit the room.

"Upon second thoughts," said Marguerite, "I see no cause for alarm. The key was given to you without any directions, and you will be considered as having given me the preference to-night."

"And so I do, Marguerite! Consent but to forget——"

"Not so loud!—not so loud, sir!" replied the queen, employing the same words she had a few minutes before used to her mother: "any one in the adjoining cabinet can hear you. I must beg of you to use a lower tone."

"Oh!" said Henry, half smiling, half gloomily, "that's true! I forgot that I was probably not the person with whom the interesting events of to-day were to close! This cabinet——"

"Let me beg of your majesty to enter there," said Marguerite; "for I am desirous of having the honor of presenting to you a brave gentleman, wounded during the massacre, while endeavoring to make his way to the Louvre, for the purpose of apprising your majesty of the danger with which you were threatened"

The queen advanced towards the door, followed by Henry. She opened it, and the king was thunderstruck at beholding a man in this cabinet, fated to reveal such continued surprises.

But, however great the king's astonishment, that of La Mole, at thus unexpectedly finding himself in the presence of Henry of Navarre, was still greater. The king cast an ironical glance on Marguerite, who bore it without flinching.

"Sir," said she, "I am in dread that this gentleman may be murdered even here, in the sanctuary of my apartments; he is devoted to the service of your majesty, and for that reason I commend him to your royal protection."

"Sir," continued the young man, "I am the Count Lerac de la Mole; the same your majesty expected, who was so warmly recommended to you by M. de Teligny, who was killed by my side."

"Indeed!" replied Henry; "is it so, sir? I remember the queen gave me a letter from that honorable gentleman; but, methinks, if you be the Count de la Mole, you should also be the bearer of a letter from the Governor of Languedoc."

"Your majesty is right: such a paper was entrusted to me, with earnest recommendation to deliver it into your royal hands as soon as possible."

"And wherefore did you delay?"

"Sir, I was at the Louvre yesterday evening, for that purpose; but your majesty was too much occupied to give me audience."

"True!" answered the king; "but in that case why not send the letter to me?"

"Because M. d'Auriac had strictly charged me to give it into no other hands than those of your majesty, since it contained, he said, information so important that he feared to entrust it to any ordinary messenger."

"The contents are, indeed, of a serious nature," said the king, when he had received and perused the letter; "advising my instant withdrawal from the court of France, and retirement to Béarn. M. d'Auriac, although a Catholic, was always a stanch friend of mine; and it is possible, that acting as governor of a province, he got scent of what was in the wind here. *Ventre-saint-gris!* monsieur! why was not this letter given to me three days ago, instead of now?"

"Because, as I before assured your majesty, that using all the speed and diligence in my power, it was wholly impossible to arrive before yesterday."

"That is very unfortunate," murmured the king; "for had you done so, we should at this time have been in security, either at Rochelle, or in some broad plain surrounded by two or three thousand trusty horsemen."

"Sir," said Marguerite, in an undertone, "what is done is done, and instead of losing your time in useless recrimination, it is expedient for you to make the best arrangement you can for the future."

"Then," replied Henry, with his usual glance of interrogation, "I am to suppose that, in my place, you would not despair?"

"Certainly not; I should consider myself as playing a game of three points, of which I had lost only the first."

"Ah, madame," whispered Henry, "if I durst but hope that you would go partners with me in the game, I should indeed flatter myself with hopes of success."

"Had I intended to have sided with your adversaries," replied Marguerite, "I should scarcely have delayed thus long in avowing my intentions."

"True!" replied Henry, "and I am very ungrateful; but, as you say, the past may still be repaired. But madame," continued he, attentively observing La Mole, "this gentleman cannot remain here without causing you considerable inconvenience, and being himself subject to very unpleasant surprises. What will you do with him?"

"Does your majesty consider there will be any difficulty in getting him out of the Louvre?—for I am precisely of your opinion as regards his staying."

"I fear it will be both difficult and dangerous to attempt such a thing as procuring egress for the young man."

"Then, could not your majesty find accommodation for M. de la Mole in your own apartments?"

"Alas, madame! you speak as though I were still king of the Huguenots, and had subjects to command. You are aware that I am half converted to the Catholic faith."

Any one but Marguerite would have promptly answered:

"And he also is a Catholic." But the queen wished Henry himself to ask her to do the very thing she was desirous of effecting; while La Mole, perceiving the hesitation of his protectress, and not knowing what to say or do in so dangerous a court as was that of France, remained perfectly silent.

"But what is this the governor says in his letter?' said Henry, again casting his eyes over the missive he held in his hand. "He states that your mother was a Catholic, and from that circumstance originates the interest he felt in you."

"And what were you telling me, M. le Comte, respecting a vow you had formed to change your religion? I confess my recollection on the subject is somewhat confused. Have the goodness to assist me, M. de la Mole. Did not your conversation refer to something of the nature his majesty appears to desire?"

"Alas! madame, what I did say was so coldly received by your majesty, that I had not the courage to repeat it."

"Simply, because it in no way concerned me," answered Marguerite. "But explain yourself to the king—make fully known what you were desirous of stating to me."

"What is the vow you referred to?" asked the king. "Let me hear."

"Sir," said La Mole, "when pursued by assassins, myself unarmed, and almost expiring with pain and agony from my wounds, I fancied I beheld the spirit of my mother, holding a cross in her hands, and guiding me towards the Louvre. Under this impression, I solemnly vowed that if my life were preserved, I would adopt the religion of my mother, who had been permitted to leave her grave to direct me to a place of safety during that horrible night. Heaven conducted me hither, where I hold myself doubly secure, under the protection of a princess of France and of the King of Navarre; and in deep gratitude for the miraculous preservation vouchsafed to me, I am ready to fulfil my vow, and become a Catholic."

Henry frowned. Skeptic as he was, he could well understand a change of religion from motives of interest; but, as a matter of faith and conscience, it was wholly beyond his comprehension.

"It is all over!" thought Marguerite; "the king evidently will have nothing to do with my *protégé*."

La Mole still remained a mute spectator of the rest of a scene, in which he felt, without being able to define why, that he played but a ridiculous part. Marguerite's tact and woman's wit came again, happily, to his relief and rescue.

"Sir," said she, "we both forget that the poor wounded gentleman has need of repose. For myself, I am half asleep. See!—he is growing pale, as though he would faint."

La Mole did indeed turn pale; but it was at Marguerite's last words, which he had interpreted according to his own ideas.

"Well, madame," answered Henry, "nothing can be easier than for you and I to retire, and leave M. de la Mole to take the repose he so much needs."

The young man fixed a supplicating look on Marguerite, and, spite of the august presence in which he stood, sunk upon a chair, overcome with fatigue and pain. Marguerite fully comprehended the passionate love contained in that glance, the utter despair, in the prostration of strength which took from his limbs the power of supporting him.

"Sir," said she, "your majesty is bound to confer on this young man, who periled his life for his king, since it was while coming hither to acquaint you with the death of the admiral and Teligny he received his wounds—is bound, I repeat, to confer on him an honor, for which he will be ever grateful."

"What is it, madame?" asked Henry. "Command me—I am ready to do whatever you dictate."

"'Tis to permit M. de la Mole to repose to-night at your majesty's feet, while you, sir, can sleep on this couch. With the permission of my august spouse," added Marguerite, smiling, "I will summon Gillonne, and return to bed; for I can assure you I am not the least wearied of us three."

Henry had shrewd sense, and a quick perception of things; friends and enemies subsequently found fault with him for possessing too much of both. He fully admitted that she who thus banished him from the nuptial bed was well justified in so doing by the indifference he had himself manifested towards her—and then, too, she had just repaid this indifference by saving his life; he therefore did not allow his wounded self-love to dictate his answer, but merely replied:

"If, madame, M. de la Mole were capable of coming to my apartments, I would give him up my own bed."

"Nay," said Marguerite, "I scarcely deem that either you or he would be in safety there to-night, and prudence directs that your majesty should remain here until the morning."

Then, without awaiting any further reply from the king, she summoned Gillonne, and bade her prepare the necessary cushions for the king, and to arrange a bed at the king's feet for M. de la Mole, who appeared so happy and contented with the honor done him, as almost to forget his wounds.

Then Marguerite, curtseying low to the king, passed into the adjoining chamber, the door of which was well furnished with bolts, and threw herself on the bed.

"One thing is certain," said Marguerite, mentally, "that, to-morrow, M. de la Mole must have a protector at the Louvre; and he who, to-night, sees and hears nothing, may change his mind to-morrow."

Then, calling Gillonne, she said in a whisper, "Gillonne, you must contrive to bring my brother D'Alençon here to-morrow morning before eight o'clock."

The loud peal of the Louvre clock chimed the second hour after midnight.

La Mole, after a short parley with the king on political subjects, was left to his own reflections; for Henry fell asleep in the midst of one of his own speeches, and snored as lustily as though he had been reposing on his own leathern couch in Béarn.

La Mole might also have sunk into the arms of sleep, but his ideas were continually disturbed and disarranged by his proximity to Marguerite, who, a prey to restless thoughts, turned and re-turned on her pillow; while the mind of La Mole became occupied in sympathetic surprise as to what could trouble the slumbers of one so highly favored both by nature and fortune.

"He is very young and timid," murmured the wakeful queen; "but his eyes are rich with manly expression, and his form is one of nobleness and beauty; 'twere pity he should turn out otherwise than brave and loyal. Well, well, 'tis useless speculating upon uncertain chances: the affair has begun well, let us hope it will finish so; and now to commend myself to the triple deity to whom that madcap Henriette pays homage, and court its aid to procure a visit from the drowsy god."

And as morning broke, Marguerite fell asleep, murmuring, "*Eros, Cupido, Amor.*"

CHAPTER XV.

WHAT WOMAN WILLS, HEAVEN WILLS ALSO.

MARGUERITE was right. The rage which swelled Catherine's bosom at sight of an expedient whose aim she perceived, although powerless to prevent its effects, required some person on whom she could freely vent it: instead, therefore, of retiring to her own apartment, the queen mother proceeded to those of her lady-in-waiting.

Madame de Sauve was expecting two visits,—one she hoped to receive from Henry, and the other she feared was in store for her from the queen-mother. Reclining on her bed only partially undressed, while Dariole kept watch in the antechamber, she heard a key turn in the lock, followed by a slow, measured tread, the heaviness of which was prevented from reaching her ear through the thickness of the rich carpets over which the newcomer passed; but she felt quite sure it was not the light, eager footstep of Henry; and guessing that Dariole had been prevented from coming to warn her of the visitant who so late intruded on her repose, she lay with beating heart and listening ear, awaiting the nearer approach of friend or foe, as it might turn out.

The curtain which covered the doorway was lifted aside, and Catherine de Medicis appeared. She seemed calm; but Madame de Sauve, accustomed for two years to the study of her crafty and deceitful nature, well knew what fatal designs, as well as bitter thoughts of cruel vengeance, might be concealed beneath that cold imperturbable tranquillity of look and manner.

At sight of Catherine, Madame de Sauve was about to spring from her bed, but Catherine signed to her to remain where she was; and thus her unfortunate victim was compelled to remain as though spell-bound, vainly endeavoring to collect all strength to endure the storm she felt was breaking over her.

"Did you convey the key to the King of Navarre?" inquired Catherine, in a voice which differed not from her usual tone; the only change was in her lips, which looked paler and paler each instant.

"I did, madame," answered Charlotte, in a voice that vainly sought to imitate the firm, assured manner of Catherine.

"And have you seen him?"

"No, madame; but I expect him; and when I heard the sound of a key in the lock, I fully concluded it was he."

This reply, which indicated either a blind confidence or profound dissimulation on the part of Madame de Sauve, enraged Catherine beyond all power of concealment; she literally shook with passion, and clenching her small plump hand, she said, with a malignant smile:

"'Tis strange, methinks, you should expect the King of Navarre in your apartments, when you perfectly well know how unlikely it is he should be here!"

"How, madame?"

"Yes, I repeat, you are fully aware that this night the King of Navarre neither could nor would visit you."

"Nothing but death would prevent him, I feel confident," replied Charlotte, urged to a still more determined dissimulation by the certainty of how bitterly she should have to pay for her deceit, were it discovered.

"But did you not write to the king, my pretty Carlotta?" inquired Catherine, with the same cruel and unnatural smile.

"No, madame," answered Charlotte, with well-assumed naïveté, "I cannot recollect receiving your majesty's commands to do so."

A short silence followed, during which Catherine continued to gaze on Madame de Sauve as the serpent regards the bird it wishes to fascinate.

"You think yourself a beauty and a skilful maneuverer, do you not?" asked Catherine.

"No, indeed, madame," answered Charlotte; "I only remember that there have been times when your majesty has been graciously pleased to commend both my personal attractions and address."

"Well, then," said Catherine, growing eager and animated, "whatever I may have said or thought, I now declare that you are but a hideous dolt, when compared to my daughter Margot."

"Oh, madame," replied Charlotte, "that is a fact I seek not to deny—least of all in your presence."

"It follows, then, naturally enough, that the King of Navarre prefers my daughter to you; a circumstance, I presume, not to your wishes, and certainly not what we agreed should be the case."

"Alas! madame," cried Charlotte, bursting into a torrent of tears which now flowed from no feigned source, "if it be so, I can but say I am very unfortunate!"

"Then take my royal word for its truth," repeated Catherine, again fixing her reptile-like eye upon her victim, till her words seemed to pierce her heart like a two-edged dagger.

"But what reason has your majesty for coming to this conclusion?"

"Proceed to the apartments of the Queen of Navarre, you incredulous simpleton! and you will find your lover there. How like you that? Does it excite your jealousy?".

"Me jealous?" said Madame de Sauve, recalling her fast-failing strength and courage.

"Yes, you! Tell me how you mean to act. I have a curiosity to see how a Frenchwoman demonstrates that passion."

"Nay," said Madame de Sauve, "why should your majesty suppose I am wounded in any other feeling than my vanity, since all the interest I feel in the King of Navarre arises from my wish to be of service to your majesty."

Catherine looked at her with a penetrating glance.

"You may be speaking the truth," said she. "Am I, then, to consider you as wholly devoted to my service?"

"Command me, madame, and judge."

"Well, then, Carlotta, if you are really sincere in your professions and protestations, you must (to serve me, understand) affect the utmost affection for the King of Navarre, and, above all, a violent jealousy. Pretend to be jealous as an Italian."

"And in what manner, madame, do the Italian females evince their jealousy?"

"I will instruct you," replied Catherine; who, after remaining some moments as though striving to keep down some powerful emotion, quitted the apartment slowly and noiselessly as she had entered it.

Thankful to be freed from the oppressive gaze of eyes that seemed to expand and dilate like those of the cat or panther, Charlotte permitted her to depart without attempting to utter a word; nor did she breathe freely till Dariole came to tell her that the terrible visitant had entirely disappeared. She then bade the waiting-maid to bring an armchair beside her bed and pass the night, fearing, as she said, to be left alone. Dariole obeyed; but, despite the company of her faithful attendant, despite the bright light from a lamp illumined by her orders, Madame de Sauve remained in trembling expectation of Catherine's return, nor closed her eyes till the dawn of day.

Notwithstanding the late hour at which Marguerite's slumbers had commenced, she awoke at the first sound of the hunting-horns and dogs, and instantly rising, dressed herself in a negligé too decided to escape observation. She then summoned her maids, and caused the ordinary attendants of the King of Navarre to be shown into an antechamber adjoining that in which he had passed the night. Then, opening the door of the chamber which contained both Henry and De la Mole, she cast an affectionate glance on the latter, and said to her husband :

"It is not sufficient, sir, to have persuaded my royal mother that matters are different from what they seem ; you must also impress upon your whole court the most perfect belief in the good understanding existing between us. But make yourself quite easy," added she, laughing, "and remember my words, rendered the more impressive by the circumstances under which I utter them, to-day is the very last time your majesty will be subjected to so severe a trial."

Henry smiled, and desired that the officers of his suite should be admitted ; but at the very moment of returning their salutation, he feigned suddenly to recollect having left his mantle on the queen's bed, begged their excuse for receiving them ere fully dressed ; then, taking his mantle from the hands of Marguerite, who stood blushing by his side, he clasped it on his shoulder. Next, turning to his gentlemen, he carelessly inquired what was stirring abroad.

Marguerite's quick eye readily caught the expression of utter astonishment impressed on every countenance at the sight of the excellent terms on which herself and the King of Navarre were ; and, ere they had recovered from it, an attendant entering, announced the arrival of the Duke d'Alençon, with three or four officers of his suite.

Gillonne had required no other means to draw him thither, than the information of the king having passed the night in the queen's apartments ; and so hurried was the manner of François in entering, that he narrowly escaped knocking against every person he met in his way. His first glance was directed to Henry ; his next, to Marguerite. The former replied to him by a courteous salutation, while the calm, composed features of Marguerite exhibited the utmost serenity and happiness.

Again the sharp scrutiny of the duke traveled round the chamber, and he quickly observed the two pillows placed at the head of the bed, the derangement of its tapestried coverings, and the king's plumed hat carelessly thrown on a chair beside it.

At this sight his color forsook his cheeks, but quickly recovering himself, he said:

"Does my royal brother Henry join this morning with the king in his game of tennis?"

"Does his majesty do me the honor to select me as his partner?" inquired Henry, "or is it only a little attention on your own part, my kind brother-in-law?"

"His majesty has not so said, certainly," replied the duke, somewhat embarrassed; "but as you play with him so habitually, I considered——"

Henry smiled, for so many and such serious events had occurred since he last played with the king, that he would not have been astonished to learn that the king had changed his habitual companions at the game.

"I shall certainly join the king in his sport," said Henry, with a smile.

"Then come," cried the duke.

"Are you going away?" inquired Margaret.

"Yes, my sweet sister!"

"Are you in great haste to be gone?"

"In very great!"

"Might I venture to ask you to grant me a few minutes ere you depart?"

So strange and wholly unaccustomed a demand from Marguerite filled D'Alençon with a vague and uneasy feeling of something to be apprehended, and his color changed rapidly from a deep flush to the palest hue.

"What can she be going to say to him?" thought Henry, taken as much by surprise as the duke himself.

Marguerite quietly proceeded to the door of the cabinet, and beckoned forth the wounded man, saying to Henry:

"It is for your majesty to explain to my brother the reason for our taking an interest in M. de la Mole."

And Henry, caught in the snare so cleverly laid by Marguerite, briefly related to M. d'Alençon half a Protestant for the sake of opposition, as he himself was partly a Catholic from prudence, the arrival of M. de la Mole at Paris, and how the young man had been severely wounded, while bringing to him a letter from M. d'Auriac.

As the duke turned round after listening to this recital, he perceived the hero of the tale standing before him.

At the sight of his pale handsome countenance, rendered still more captivating by the marks of recent weakness and suffering, a fresh feeling of anger and distrust shot through his heart.

"Brother," said Marguerite, after she had well observed the various changes of D'Alençon's countenance, "I will engage for this young gentleman, that he will render himself serviceable to whomsoever may employ him. Should you accept his services, he will obtain a powerful protector, and you a faithful, zealous servitor. In such times as the present, brother," continued she, "we cannot be too well surrounded by devoted friends: more especially," added she, lowering her voice so as to be heard only by the duke, "when one is ambitious, and has the misfortune to be only third in the succession to the throne."

Then, placing her finger significantly on her lip, she intimated to D'Alençon that she had not revealed the whole of her views and ideas on the subject, but had the most important part still buried within her own breast.

"Perhaps," added she, "you may differ from Henry, in considering it not decorous or befitting that this young gentleman should remain so immediately in the vicinity of my apartments."

"Sister," replied François, "if it meet your wishes, M. de la Mole shall, in half an hour, be installed in my apartments, where, I think, he can have no cause to fear any danger. Let him try to win my affection, and I promise him he shall obtain it."

"Excellent," murmured Marguerite to herself, as she saw the frown that hung over the brow of the King of Navarre. "Ah, I see plainly enough, that to lead you both as I would have you go, it is necessary to make one lead the other."

And in half an hour after this, La Mole, having been gravely lectured by Marguerite, kissed the hem of her robe, and descended to the apartments of D'Alençon with a step wondrously light and agile for one who had been so recently wounded.

Several days passed away, and appeared still further to consolidate the harmony apparently existing between Henry and his wife.

Henry had obtained permission not to make a public renunciation of his religion ; but he had formally recanted in the presence of the king's confessor, and every day went openly to mass.

At midnight he took ostensibly the road to his wife's apartments, entered by the principal door, and after remaining some time in conversation with her, quitted by the secret door, and ascended to the chamber of Madame de Sauve, who had duly informed him of the visit of the queen-mother, as well as the imminent danger which so seriously threatened him. Thus warned and protected on both sides, Henry redoubled his mistrust and his caution against Catherine, and this with a deeper impression of such a line of proceeding being necessary, as the queen-mother had lately bestowed smiles instead of frowns on him, and addressed him with words of studied cordiality.

Though the massacres still continued, their extent and violence were naturally lessened, and bade fair soon to end ; for so great had been the butchery of the Huguenots, that the supply began to fail, and fresh victims were not easily found. The greater part of those unfortunate people were already sacrificed. Many had found safety in flight, and others were in concealment. Occasionally a great outcry would arise in some neighborhood in which a fresh object of popular fury was discovered ; and the execution was either public or private, according as the spot was either a confined one or admitted of escape.

Charles the Ninth had taken great pleasure in hunting down the Huguenots, and when he could no longer continue the chase himself, he took delight in the noise of others hunting.

One day, returning from playing at mall, which with tennis and hunting were his favorite amusements, he went to his mother's apartments in high spirits, followed by his usual train of courtiers.

"Mother," he said, embracing the Florentine, who, observing his joy, endeavored to detect its cause, "mother, good news! Mort de tous les diables! Do you know that the illustrious carcass of the admiral, which it was said was lost, has been found?"

"Ah, ah!" said Catherine.

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* yes. You thought as I did, mother. the dogs had eaten a wedding dinner off him; but it was not so. My people, my dear people, my good people, had a clever idea, and have hung the admiral up at the gibbet of Montfaucon."

"Well!" said Catherine.

"Well, good mother," replied Charles IX., "I have a strong desire to see him again, dear old man, now I know he is really dead! It is very fine, and the flowers seem to smell very sweet to-day. The air is full of life and perfume, and I feel better than I ever did. If you like, mother, we will get on horseback, and go to Montfaucon."

"Willingly, my son," said Catherine, "if I had not an appointment that I cannot defer; and beside, to pay a visit to a man of such importance as the admiral, we should assemble the whole court. It will be an occasion for observers to make very curious observations. We shall see who comes and who stays away."

"*Ma foi!* you are right, mother, and it will be better to-morrow; so send out your invitations, and I will send mine; or, rather, do not let us invite any one. We will only say we are going, and then every one will be free to do as they please. Adieu, mother! I am going to play on the horn."

"You will exhaust yourself, Charles, as Ambroise Paré is always telling you; and he is right. It is too trying an exercise for you."

"Bah! bah! bah!" said Charles; "I wish I was sure nothing else would kill me; I would then bury everybody here, including Harry, who will one day succeed us all—as Nostradamus prophesies."

Catherine frowned.

"My son," she said, "mistrust more especially all things that appear impossible, and in the meanwhile take care of yourself."

"Only two or three blasts to rejoice my dogs, who are wearied to death with doing nothing, poor things! I ought to have let them loose on the Huguenots; that would have done them good!" And Charles IX. left his mother's apartment, went into his armory, took down a horn, and sounded it with a vigor that would have done honor to Roland himself. It was difficult to understand how so weak a frame and such pale lips could blow a blast so powerful.

Catherine, in truth was awaiting some one, as she had told her son. A minute after he had left her, one of her women came and spake to her in a low voice. The queen smiled, rose, and saluting the persons who formed her court, followed the messenger.

René the Florentine, he to whom, on the eve of St. Bartholomew, the King of Navarre had given so diplomatic a reception, entered the oratory.

"Ah! is it you René?" said Catherine. "Have you renewed, as I desired, the trial of the horoscope drawn by Ruggieri, and which agrees so well with the prophecy of Nostradamus, which says that all my three sons shall reign?"

"Yes, madame," replied René; "for it is my duty to obey you in all things."

"Well—and the result?"

"Still the same, madame."

"What, the black lamb has uttered three cries?"

"Precisely, madame."

"The sign of three cruel deaths in my family," murmured Catherine.

"Alas!" said René.

"What then?"

"Then, madame, there was in its entrails that strange displacing of the liver, which we had already observed in the two first."

"A change of dynasty still—still—still!" muttered Catherine; "yet this must be changed, René," she added.

René shook his head.

"I have told your majesty," he said, "that destiny rules all."

"Is that your opinion?" asked Catherine.

"Yes, madame."

"Do you remember D'Albret's horoscope?"

"Yes, madame."

"Let us repeat it, and once more consider it. I have quite forgotten it. Repeat it to me, good René."

"*Vives honorata,*" said René, "*morieris reformidata, regina amplificabere.*"

"Which means, I believe," said Catherine, "*Thou shalt live honored*—and she lacked common necessaries; *Thou shalt die feared*—and we laughed at her; *Thou shalt be greater than thou hast been as a queen*—and she is dead, and sleeps in a tomb, on which we have not even engraved her name."

"Madame, your majesty does not translate the *vives honorata* rightly. The Queen of Navarre lived honored; for all her life she enjoyed the love of her children, the respect of her partisans; respect and love all the more sincere in that she was poor."

"Yes," said Catherine, "I pass over the *vives honorata;* but *morieris reformidata:* how will you explain that?"

"Nothing more easy: Thou shalt die feared."

"Well—did she die feared?"

"So much so, that she would not have died had not your majesty feared her. Then—*As a queen thou shalt be greater;* or, *Thou shalt be greater than thou hast been as a queen.* This is equally true, madame; for in exchange for a terrestrial crown, she has doubtless, as a queen and martyr, a celestial crown; and, besides, who knows what the future may reserve for her posterity?"

Catherine was superstitious to an excess; she was more alarmed at René's cool pertinacity than at the pertinacity of the auguries; and she said suddenly to him, without any other transition than the working of her own thoughts:

"Are any Italian perfumes arrived?"

"Yes, madame."

"Send me a box full."

"Of which?"

"Of the last, of those——"

Catherine stopped.

"Of those the Queen of Navarre was so fond of?" asked René.

"Exactly."

"I need not prepare them, for your majesty is now as skilful at them as myself."

"You think so?" said Catherine. "They certainly do succeed."

"Your majesty has nothing more to say to me?" asked the perfumer.

"Nothing," replied Catherine, thoughtfully; "only if there is any change in the sacrifices, let me know it in time. Let us leave the lambs, and try the hens."

"Alas! madame, I fear that in changing the victim we shall not change the presages."

"Do as I tell you."

The perfumer bowed and left the apartment.

Catherine mused for a short time, then rose, and returning to her bedchamber, where her women awaited her, announced the pilgrimage to Montfaucon for the morrow.

The news of this party of pleasure threw the palace and city into no small bustle: the ladies prepared their most elegant toilettes; the gentlemen their finest arms and steeds; the tradesmen closed their shops, and the populace killed a few straggling Huguenots, in order to furnish company to the dead admiral.

La Mole had passed a miserable day, and this miserable day had followed three or four others equally miserable. M. d'Alençon, to please his sister, had installed him in his apartments, but had not since seen him ; he felt himself like a poor deserted child, deprived of the tender cares, the soothing attentions of two women, the recollections of one of whom occupied him perpetually. He had heard of her through Ambroise Paré, whom she had sent to him, but Ambroise was an old fellow to whom he could not talk of his passion. Gillonne, indeed, had come once, as if of her own accord, to ask after him, and the visit was to him like a sunbeam darting into a dungeon, but Gillonne had not repeated it.

As soon, then, as he heard of this splendid assemblage of the court on the morrow, La Mole requested of M. d'Alençon the favor of being allowed to accompany it. The duke did not even trouble himself to inquire whether La Mole was sufficiently recovered to bear the fatigue, but merely answered :

"Humph ! well, let him have one of my horses."

This was all La Mole wanted ; Maître Ambroise Paré came to dress his wounds, and La Mole explained to him the necessity he was under of mounting on horseback, and prayed him to dress his wounds with more than usual care.

The two wounds were closed, both that on the breast and that on the shoulder, and the latter alone pained him. They were both in a fair way of healing ; Maître Ambroise Paré covered them with gummed taffetas, a remedy greatly in vogue then, and promised La Mole that if he did not exert himself too much, everything would go well ; La Mole next employed a part of the money he had received when he left his family in purchasing a very handsome white satin doublet, and one of the richest embroidered cloaks he could procure. He also bought a pair of boots of perfumed leather, worn at that period. He dressed himself quickly, looked in his glass, and found that he was suitably attired, arranged, and perfumed.

Whilst he was thus engaged in the Louvre, another scene, of a similar kind, was going on at the Hôtel de Guise. A tall gentleman, with red hair, was examining, before a glass, a red mark, which went across his face very disagreeably; he colored and perfumed his moustache, and as he did so, in vain tried to conceal this wheal; in spite of all the cosmetics applied, it would still appear. The gentleman then put on a magnificent dress which a tailor had brought to his apartment without any commands from him. Thus attired, scented, and armed from head to foot, he descended the staircase, and began to pat a large black horse, whose beauty would have been matchless, but for a small scar in the flank, caused by a sword wound.

Yet, enchanted with the good steed as he found him, the gentleman, whom, no doubt, our readers have recognised, was soon on his back, and for a quarter of an hour showed off in the court of the Hôtel de Guise his skill as a horseman, amidst the neighings of his courser, and *Mordis* out of all number. Then the good steed, completely subdued, recognized by his obedience and subjection the control of the cavalier, but the victory had not been obtained without noise, and this noise had drawn to the windows a lady, whom the cavalier saluted respectfully, and who smiled at him in the most agreeable manner. Turning then towards her first gentleman:

"M. d'Arguzon," she said, "let us set out for the Louvre, and keep an eye, I beg, on the Comte Annibal de Coconnas, for he is wounded, and consequently still weak; and I would not for all the world any accident should happen to him. That would make the Huguenots laugh, for they owe him a spite since the blessed night of Saint Bartholomew."

And Madame de Nevers, mounting her horse, went joyfully towards the Louvre, which was the general rendezvous.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BODY OF A DEAD ENEMY ALWAYS SMELLS SWEET.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon, when a file of cavaliers, glittering with gold, jewels, and splendid garments, appeared in the Rue Saint-Denis.

Nothing can be imagined more splendid than this spectacle. The rich and elegant silk dresses, bequeathed as a splendid fashion by François I. to his successors, had not yet been changed into those formal and sombre vestments which came into fashion under Henry III.; so that the costume of Charles IX., less rich, but perhaps more elegant than those of preceding reigns, displayed its perfect harmony. Pages, esquires, gentlemen of low degree, dogs, and horses—all were there, and formed of the royal cortége an absolute army. Behind this army came the people, or rather the people were everywhere.

That morning, in presence of Catherine, and the Duke de Guise, Charles had, as a perfectly natural thing, spoken before Henry of Navarre of going to visit the gibbet of Montfaucon, or rather, the mutilated corpse of the admiral, which had been suspended to it. Henry's first movement had been to dispense with accompanying them; this Catherine had expected at the first words he said, expressing his repugnance, and she exchanged a glance and a smile with the Duke de Guise; Henry surprised both and understood them, then suddenly turning round, he said:

"But why should I not go? I am a Catholic, and am bound to my new religion."

Then, addressing the king:

"Your majesty may reckon on my company," he said; "and I shall be always happy to accompany you wheresoever you may go;" and he threw a sweeping glance around, to see whose brows might be frowning.

And, perhaps of all this cortège, the person who was looked at with the greatest curiosity was this son without a mother—this king without a kingdom—this Huguenot turned Catholic. His long and marked countenance, his somewhat vulgar figure, his familiarity with his inferiors, which he carried to a degree almost derogatory to a king —a familiarity acquired by the mountaineer habits of his youth, and which he preserved till his death—marked him out to the spectators, some of whom cried :

"To mass, Harry ! to mass !"

To which Henry replied :

"I attended it yesterday, to-day, and I shall attend it again to-morrow. *Ventre saint-gris!* surely that is sufficient."

Marguerite was on horseback—so lovely, so fresh, so elegant, that she was the admired of all admirers, although the Duchess de Nevers shared some portion of the general approval.

"Well, duchess !" said the Queen of Navarre, "what news ?"

"Why, Madame," replied the duchess, aloud, "I know of none." Then in a lower tone : "And what has become of the Huguenot ?"

"I have found him a retreat almost safe," replied Marguerite ; "and the wholesale murderer, what have you done with him ?"

"He wished to be present, and so we mounted him on M. de Nevers's war-horse, a creature as big as an elephant. He is a fearful cavalier. I allowed him to be present to-day, as I felt that your Huguenot would be prudent enough to keep his chamber, and that there was no fear of their meeting."

"Oh, *ma foi!*" replied Marguerite, smiling, "if he were here, and he is not, I do not think a rencontre would ensue. My Huguenot is remarkably handsome, but nothing more—a dove, and not a hawk ; he coos, but does not rend in pieces. After all," she added, with a gesture impossible to describe, and shrugging her shoulders slightly ; "after all, perhaps, our king thought him a Huguenot, whilst he is only a Brahmin, and his religion forbids him to shed blood."

"But where, then, is the Duke d'Alençon?" inquired Henriette; "I do not see him."

"Why, at this moment there are shouts down there. It is he, doubtless, who is passing the Porte-Montmartre."

"Yes; it is he, and he seems in good spirits to-day," said Henriette; "he is in love, perchance; and see how nice it is to be a prince of the blood: he gallops over everybody, and everybody draws on one side."

"Yes," said Marguerite, laughing, "he will ride over us. But draw your attendants on one side, duchess, for one of them will be killed: he does not give way."

"It is my hero!" cried the duchess; "look, only look!"

Coconnas had quitted his rank to approach the Duchess de Nevers, but at the moment when his horse was crossing the kind of exterior boulevard which separates the street from the Faubourg Saint-Denis, a cavalier of the suite of the Duke d'Alençon, trying in vain to rein in his excited horse, dashed full against Coconnas, who, shaken by the collision, well-nigh lost his seat; his hat nearly fell off, and as he put it on firmer, he turned round furiously.

"*Dieu!*" said Marguerite, in a low tone, to her friend, "M. de la Mole!"

"That handsome pale young man?" exclaimed the duchess, unable to repress her first impression.

"Yes, yes; he who nearly upset your Piedmontese."

"Oh," said the duchess, "something terrible will happen! they look at each other—recollect each other!"

Coconnas had indeed recognized La Mole, and in his surprise dropped his bridle, for he believed he had killed his old companion, or at least put him *hors de combat* for some time. La Mole had also recognized Coconnas, and all his blood rushed up into his face. For some seconds, which sufficed for the expression of all the sentiments which these two men felt towards each other, they gazed on one another in a way that frightened the two women.

After which, La Mole having looked about him, and seeing that the place was ill chosen for any explanation, spurred his horse and rejoined the Duke d'Alençon. Coconnas remained stationary for a moment, twisting his mustache until the point almost entered his eye ; then, seeing La Mole dash off without a word, he did the same.

"Ah ! ah !" said Marguerite, with painful contempt, "I was not deceived, then !—it is really too much ;" and she bit her lips till the blood came.

"He is very handsome," added the Duchess de Nevers, with commiseration.

Just at this moment the Duke d'Alençon reached his place behind the king and the queen-mother, so that his suite, in following him, were obliged to pass before Marguerite and the Duchess de Nevers. La Mole, as he passed, raised his hat, saluted the queen, and, bowing to his horse's neck, remained uncovered until her majesty should honor him with a look.

But Marguerite turned her head aside disdainfully.

La Mole, no doubt, comprehended the contemptuous expression of the queen's features, and from pale he became livid, and that he might not fall from his horse, was compelled to hold on by the mane.

"Ah, ah !" said Henriette to the queen ; "look, cruel that you are !—he is going to faint."

"Good," said the queen, with a smile of disdain ; "it only needs that. Where are your salts ?"

Madame de Nevers was mistaken. La Mole, with an effort, recovered himself, and, sitting erect on his horse, took his place in the Duke d'Alençon's suite.

As they went forward, they at length saw the fearful outline of the gibbet, erected and first used by Enguerrand de Marigny.

The guards advanced and formed a large ring round the spot ; at their approach, the crows perched on the gibbet flew away, croaking and angry.

The crowd advanced ; the king and Catherine arrived first, then the Duke d'Anjou, the Duke d'Alençon, the King of Navarre, M. de Guise, and their followers ; then Madame Marguerite, the Duchess de Nevers, and all the women who composed what was called *l'escadron volant de la reine* (the queen's flying squadron); then the pages, squires, attendants, and people—in all ten thousand persons.

To the principal gibbet was suspended a misshapen mass, stained with coagulated blood and mud, whitened by layers of dust. The carcass was headless, and they had hung it up by the legs, and the people, ingenious as they always are, had replaced the head with a bunch of straw, on which they had put a mask; and in the mouth of this mask some wag, knowing the admiral's habit, had introduced a toothpick.

It was a sight at once appalling and singular as all these elegant lords and handsome ladies defiled in the midst of blackened carcasses and gibbets, and their long and sinister arms.

Many could scarcely support this horrible spectacle, and by his paleness might be distinguished, in the center of rallied Huguenots, Henry, who however great his power over himself and his amount of dissimulation, could not bear it any longer.

He made as his excuse the strong smell which emanated from those human remains, and going towards Charles, who, with Catherine, had stopped in front of the admiral's dead body, he said:

"Sire, does not your majesty find that this poor carcass smells so strongly that it is impossible to remain near it any longer?"

"Do you find it so, Harry?" inquired the king, his eyes sparkling with ferocious joy.

"Yes, sire."

"Well, then, I am not of your opinion; the corpse of a dead enemy always smells sweet."

"Come, come, sire!" said Catherine, who, in spite of the perfume with which she was covered, began to be incommoded with the putrid odor. "Come, however agreeable company may be, it must be left at last; let us therefore bid adieu to the admiral, and return to Paris."

She made with her head an ironical gesture, in imitation of a leave-taking from a friend, and, going to the front of the columns, regained the road, whilst the cortége defiled before the corpse of Coligny.

The sun was fast sinking in the horizon.

The crowd followed so rapidly, that in ten minutes after the departure of the king, there was no person about the mutilated carcass of the admiral, which was now blown upon by the first breezes of the evening.

When we say no person, we mistake. A gentleman, mounted on a black horse, and who, doubtless, could not contemplate at his ease the misshapen and mutilated trunk when it was honored by the presence of princes, had remained behind, and was examining, in all their details, the bolts, stone pillars, chains, and so on, of the gibbet, which no doubt appeared to him (but lately arrived in Paris, and ignorant of the perfection to which things could be brought in the capital) the paragon of all that man could invent of the outrageously disgusting.

We need hardly inform our friends that this individual, in ecstasy before the handiwork of Enguerrand de Marigny, was M. Annibal de Coconnas.

The eye of a female had in vain sought him in the ranks; but this eye was not the only one that sought M. de Coconnas; another gentleman, remarkable from his white satin doublet and flowing plume, after having gazed around him on all sides, at length caught sight of the tall figure of Coconnas and the vast outline of his horse, and then the gentleman in the white satin doublet left the line which the main body was taking, and turning to the right, and describing a semicircle, returned towards the gibbet. Almost at the same moment, the lady, whom we have recognized for the Duchess de Nevers, approached Marguerite, and said to her:

"We were both deceived, Marguerite; for the Piedmontese has remained behind, and M. de la Mole has followed him."

"*Mordi!*" replied Marguerite, laughing, "then something is going to happen. *Ma foi!* I confess I shall not be sorry to have occasion to change my opinion."

Marguerite then turned round, and saw La Mole execute the maneuver we have described.

Then the two princesses quitted the main body, at the first favorable occasion, and turned down a path, bordered on both sides by hedges, which led back to within thirty paces of the gibbet. Madame de Nevers said a word in her captain's ear, Marguerite made a sign to Gillonne, and the four persons went by the cross road to ensconce themselves behind the bushes nearest to the spot in which was to pass the scene they desired to witness.

Marguerite alighted, as did Madame de Nevers and Gillonne, and the Captain, in his turn, who took charge of the four horses. A space in the hedge allowed the three women to see all that passed.

La Mole had reached Coconnas, and, stretching out his hand, tapped him on the shoulder.

The Piedmontese turned round.

"Oh!" said he, "then it was not a dream! You are still alive!"

"Yes, sir," replied La Mole; "yes, I am still alive. It is no fault of yours, but I am still alive."

"*Mordi!* I know you again well enough," replied Coconnas, "in spite of your pale face. You were redder than that the last time we met!"

"And I," said La Mole; "I also recognize you, in spite of that yellow line across your face. You were paler than that when I made that mark for you!"

Coconnas bit his lips, but, resolved on continuing the conversation in a tone of irony, he said:

"It is curious, is it not, Monsieur de la Mole, particularly for a Huguenot, to be able to look at the admiral suspended from an iron hook? And yet they say that we are guilty of killing even the small Huguenots, who were sucking at the breast."

"Comte," said La Mole, bowing, "I am no longer a Huguenot; I have the happiness to be a Catholic!"

"Bah!" exclaimed Coconnas, bursting into loud laughter; "you are a convert—eh, sir? Well, that's well managed!"

"Sir," replied La Mole, with the same seriousness and the same politeness, "I made a vow to become a convert if I escaped the massacre."

"Comte," said the Piedmontese, "that was a very prudent vow, and I beg to congratulate you. Made you no others?"

"Yes," answered La Mole, "I made a second." And as he said so, he patted his horse with entire coolness.

"And what might that be?" inquired Coconnas.

"To hang you up there, by that small nail which seems to await you beneath M. de Coligny."

"What, as I am now?" asked Coconnas, "alive and merry?"

"No, sir; but after having passed my sword through your body!"

Coconnas became purple, and his eyes darted flames.

"You are not tall enough to do it, my little sir!"

"Then I'll get on your horse, my great manslayer," replied La Mole. "Ah, you believe, my dear M. Annibal de Coconnas, that one may with impunity assassinate people under the loyal and honorable cover of a hundred to one, forsooth! But the day comes when a man finds his man; and I believe that day has come now. I should very well like to send a bullet through your ugly head; but, bah! I might miss you, for my hand is still trembling from the traitorous wounds you inflicted upon me."

"My ugly head!" shouted Coconnas, dismounting hastily. "Down—down from your horse, M. le Comte, and draw!"

And he drew his sword.

La Mole alighted as calmly as Cocannas had done so precipitately; he took off his cherry-colored cloak, laid it leisurely on the ground, drew his sword, and put himself on guard.

"Ah!" he said, as he stretched out his arm.

"Oh!" muttered Coconnas, as he did the same—for both, as it will be remembered, had been wounded in the shoulder.

A burst of laughter, ill repressed, came from the clump of bushes, and reached the ears of the two gentlemen, who were ignorant that they had witnesses, and, turning round, beheld their ladies.

La Mole resumed his guard as firm as an automaton, and Coconnas crossed his blade with an emphatic *Mordi!*

"Ah! then now they will murder each other in real earnest, if we do not interfere. There has been enough of this. Hola, gentlemen!—hola!" cried Marguerite.

"Let them be—let them be!" said Henriette, who, having seen Coconnas fight, hoped in her heart that Coconnas would make as short work with La Mole as he had done with the two nephews and the son of Mercandon.

"Oh, they are really beautiful so!" exclaimed Marguerite. "Look—they seem to breathe fire!"

And the combat, begun with railleries and mutual provocation, became silent as soon as the champions had crossed their swords. Both distrusted their strength, and each, at every quick pass, was compelled to restrain an expression of pain occasioned by his old wounds. With his eyes fixed and burning, his mouth half open, and his teeth clenched, La Mole advanced with short and firm steps towards his adversary, who, seeing in him a most skilful swordsman, retreated step by step. They both thus reached the edge of the fosse, on the other side of which were the spectators; then, as if his retreat had been only a simple stratagem to draw nearer to his lady, Coconnas took his stand, and on a motion of his blade, a little too wide, by his adversary, with the quickness of lightning, thrust in quart, and in a moment the white satin doublet of La Mole was stained with a spot of blood which kept growing larger.

"Courage!" cried the duchess.

"Ah, poor La Mole!" exclaimed Marguerite, with a cry of distress.

La Mole heard this cry, darted at the queen one of those looks which penetrate the heart even deeper than the sword's point, and taking advantage of a false parade thrust vigorously at his adversary.

This time the two women uttered two cries which seemed like one. The point of La Mole's rapier had appeared, all covered with blood, behind Coconnas' back.

Yet neither fell. Both remained erect, looking at each other with open mouth, and feeling that on the slightest movement they must lose their balance. At last the Piedmontese, more dangerously wounded than his adversary, and feeling his senses forsaking him with his blood, fell on La Mole, grasping him with one hand, whilst with the other he endeavored to unsheath his poniard. La Mole, on his part, roused all his strength, raised his hand and let fall the pommel of his sword on Coconnas' forehead, who, stupefied by the blow, fell, but in his fall drew down his adversary with him, and both rolled into the fosse.

Then Marguerite and the Duchess de Nevers, seeing that, dying as they were, they were still struggling to destroy each other, hastened towards them, followed by the captain of the guards; but before they could reach them, their hands unloosened their mutual clutch, their eyes closed, and the combatants, letting go their grasp of their weapons, stiffened as in their final agony. A large stream of blood flowed from each.

"Oh, brave, brave La Mole!" cried Marguerite, unable any longer to repress her admiration. "Ah! pardon me a thousand times for having a moment doubted your courage."

And her eyes filled with tears.

"Alas! alas!" murmured the duchess, "gallant Anibal. Did you ever see two more intrepid heroes, madame?"

And she sobbed aloud.

"Indeed, they were ugly thrusts," said the captain, endeavoring to stanch the streams of blood. "Hola! you, there, come here as quickly as you can—here, I say——"

He addressed a man who, seated on a kind of tumbril, or cart, painted red, was singing a snatch of an old song.

The carter, whose repulsive exterior formed a singular contrast with the sweet and sylvan song he was singing, stopped his horse, came towards the two bodies, and looking at them, said:

"These be terrible wounds, sure enough, but I have made worse in my time."

"Who, then, are you?" inquired Marguerite, experiencing, in spite of herself, a certain vague terror which she could not overcome.

"Madame," replied the man, bowing down to the ground, "I am Maître Caboche, headsman to the provostry of Paris, and I have come to hang up at the gibbet some companions for monsieur the admiral."

"Well! and I am the Queen of Navarre," replied Marguerite, "and I bid you cast your corpses down there, spread in your cart the housings of our horses, and bring these two gentlemen softly behind us to the Louvre."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE RIVAL OF MAÎTRE AMBROISE PARÉ.

The tumbril, in which were La Mole and Coconnas, took the road to the Louvre, following at a distance the group that served as a guide. It stopped at the Louvre, and the driver was amply rewarded. The wounded men were carried to the Duke d'Alençon's lodgings, and Maître Ambroise Paré sent for.

When he arrived, they were both insensible.

La Mole was the least hurt of the two. The sword had pierced him below the right armpit, but without touching any vital part. As for Coconnas, he was run through the lungs, and the air that escaped from his wound made the flame of a candle waver.

Ambroise Paré would not answer for Coconnas.

Madame de Nevers was in despair. She it was who, relying on Coconnas' courage and skill, had prevented Marguerite from interposing.

In order to conceal the cause of their wounds Marguerite, in having them transported to her brother's apartments, where one of them was already installed, said they were two gentlemen who had been thrown from their horses; but the real story became known, in consequence of the intense admiration of the captain who had witnessed the duel and who related all the particulars, and our two heroes had soon a brilliant reputation at court.

Attended by the same surgeon, they both passed through the different stages of convalescence, arising from the different degrees of severity of their wounds. La Mole was the first who came to himself. As for Coconnas, he was in a high fever, and his return to life was marked by all the signs of delirium.

Although in the same room as Coconnas, La Mole had not perceived his companion, or, least, had given no indication of it. Coconnas, on the contrary, when he opened his, eyes, fixed them on La Mole with an expression that proved that the blood he had lost had not modified the passions of his fiery temperament.

Coconnas thought he was dreaming, and that in this dream he saw the enemy he imagined he had twice slain. Then, that after having observed La Mole laid, like himself, on a couch, and his wounds dressed by the surgeon, he saw him rise up in bed, while he himself was still too weak to move, then get out of bed, then walk, first leaning on the surgeon's arm, and then on a cane and in the end, without assistance.

Coconnas, still delirious, viewed these different stages of his companion's recovery with eyes sometimes fixed, at others wandering, but always threatening.

Then arose in his mind, more wounded than his body, an insatiable thirst of vengeance. He was wholly occupied with one idea, that of procuring some weapon, and piercing this vision that so cruelly persecuted him. His clothes, stained with blood, had been placed on a chair by his bed, but were afterwards removed, it being thought imprudent to leave them in his sight; but his poniard still remained on the chair, for it was imagined it would be some time before he would want to employ it.

Coconnas saw the poniard; three nights, profiting by La Mole's slumbers, he strove to reach it; three nights his strength failed him, and he fainted. At length, on the fourth night, he clutched it convulsively, and groaning with the pain of the effort, concealed the weapon beneath his pillow.

The next day he saw a new spectacle. The shade of La Mole, that every day seemed to gain strength, whilst he, occupied with his design, seemed to lose his—the shade of La Mole walked thoughtfully up and down the room, three or four times, then, after having adjusted his mantle, buckled on his rapier, and put on a large hat, opened the door and went out.

Coconnas breathed again. For two hours his blood circulated more freely in his veins than it had done since the duel. One day's absence of La Mole would have recalled Coconnas' senses: a week's absence would have cured him: unfortunately, La Mole returned at the end of two hours.

This re-appearance of La Mole was a poniard stab for Coconnas; and although La Mole did not return alone, Coconnas did not give a single look at his companion.

That companion was nevertheless worth being looked at.

He was a man of forty, short, thick-set, and vigorous, with black hair, cut short, and a black beard, which, contrary to the fashion of the period, thickly covered the chin; but he seemed one who cared little for the fashion.

He wore a leather jerkin, stained and spotted with blood; red hose and leggings, thick shoes coming above the ankle; a cap the same color as his stockings, and a girdle, from which hung a large knife in a leather sheath, completed his attire.

This singular personage, whose presence in the Louvre seemed so unaccountable, threw his brown mantle on a chair, and unceremoniously approached Coconnas, whose eyes, as if fascinated, remained fixed upon La Mole, who remained at the other end of the room. He looked at the sick man, and, shaking his head, said to La Mole:

"You haven't hurried yourself."

"I could not get out sooner."

"Why did not you send for me?"

"Whom had I to send?"

"True, I forgot where we are. Ah, if my prescriptions had been followed instead of those of that ass, Ambroise Paré, you would have been by this time in a condition to go in pursuit of adventures together, or exchange another sword-thrust if you liked; but we shall see. Does your friend hear reason?"

"Scarcely."

"Hold out your tongue, sir. Ah, I see there's no time to be lost. This evening I will send you a potion ready prepared: you must make him take it at three times; once at midnight, once at one o'clock, and once at two."

"Very well."

"But who will administer it?"

"I will."

"You yourself?"

"Yes."

"You promise me?"

"On my honor."

"And if the doctor seeks to obtain any of it to analyze it?"

"I will throw it away to the last drop."

"On your honor?"

"I swear it!"

"Done; but how get it in here? Oh, faith, I'll send it to you as from Maître René, the perfumer. He poaches on my profession so often, I may surely use his name for once."

"Then," said La Mole, "I rely on you."

"You may."

"And as for the payment?"

"Oh, we will arrange about that when the gentleman is well again."

"You may be quite easy on that score, for I am sure he will pay you nobly."

"No doubt. Adieu, then, M. de la Mole. In two hours you will have the potion. You understand, it must be given at midnight, in three doses, from hour to hour."

So saying, he left the room, and La Mole was alone with Coconnas.

Coconnas had heard the whole conversation, but remembered nothing except the word "Midnight."

He continued to watch La Mole, who remained in the room, pacing thoughtfully up and down."

The unknown doctor kept his word, and at the appointed time sent the potion, which La Mole placed on a small heater, and then lay down.

The clock struck twelve. Coconnas opened his eyes; his breath seemed to scorch his lips, and his throat was parched with fever; the night lamp shed a faint light, and made thousands of phantoms dance before his eyes.

He then saw La Mole rise from his couch, walk about a few moments, and then advance towards him, threatening him, as he thought, with his clenched hand. Coconnas seized his poniard, and prepared to plunge it into his enemy.

La Mole approached.

Coconnas murmured:

"Ah! 'tis you—'tis you, then! Ah! you menace me! you threaten me! you smile! Come, come, come, that I may kill you."

And suiting the action to the word, as La Mole leaned towards him, Coconnas drew the poniard from under the clothes; but the effort exhausted him, and he fell back upon his pillow.

"Come, come," said La Mole, supporting him, "drink this, my poor fellow, for you are burnt up."

It was in reality a cup that La Mole presented to Coconnas, and which he had mistaken for his fist.

But at the nectarous sensation of this blessed draught, soothing his lips, and cooling his throat, Coconnas resumed his reason, or rather his instinct; a feeling of delight pervaded his frame; he fixed his eyes on La Mole, who was supporting him in his arms, and smiled gratefully on him; and from those orbs, so lately glowing with fury, a tear rolled down his burning cheek.

"*Mordi!*" murmured Coconnas. "If I get over this, M. de la Mole, you shall be my friend."

"And you will get over it," said La Mole, "if you will drink the other two cups, and have no more ugly dreams."

An hour afterwards La Mole, obedient to his instructions, rose again, poured a second dose into the cup, and carried it to Coconnas, who instead of receiving him with his poniard, opened his arms, eagerly swallowed the potion, and then fell asleep.

The third cup had a no less marvelous effect. The sick man's breathing became more regular, his limbs supple, a gentle perspiration diffused itself over his skin, and when Ambroise Paré visited him the next morning, he smiled complacently:

"I answer for M. de Coconnas now; and this will not be one of the least difficult cures I have effected."

The result of this scene was the friendship of the two gentlemen, which, commencing at *La belle Etoile*, and violently interrupted by the night of St. Bartholomew, now surpassed that of Orestes and Pylades by five sword-thrusts and one pistol-wound exchanged between them.

Old and new wounds, slight or serious, were at last in a fair way of cure. La Mole, though quite well, would not forsake his post of nurse until Coconnas was also recovered. He raised him in bed, and helped him when he began to walk, until by the aid of Count Annibal's naturally vigorous constitution, he was restored to perfect convalescence.

However, one and the same thought occupied both the young men. Each had in his delirium seen the woman he loved approach his couch, and yet, since they had recovered their senses, neither Marguerite nor Madame de Nevers had appeared. It is true that the gentleman who had witnessed the combat had come several times, as if of his own accord, to inquire after them; it is also true that Gillonne had done the same; but La Mole had not ventured to speak to the one concerning the queen: Coconnas had not ventured to speak to the other of Madame de Nevers.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE VISIT.

During some time the two young men kept their secret confined each to his own breast. At last, on a day of warm and mutual feeling, the thought which had so long occupied them escaped their lips, and both cemented their friendship by this final proof, without which there is no friendship—namely, perfect confidence.

They were both madly in love—one with a princess, and the other with a queen.

They both, as they recovered from their illness, took great pains with their personal appearance. Every man, even the most indifferent to physical appearance, has, at certain times, mute interviews with his looking-glass, signs of intelligence, after which he generally quits his confidant, quite satisfied with the conversation. Now our two young friends were not men whose mirrors gave them no encouragement. La Mole, thin, pale, and elegant, had the beauty of distinction ; Coconnas, powerful, large-framed, and fresh-colored, had the beauty of strength. He had more, for his recent illness had been of advantage to him. He had become thinner, grown paler ; and the famous scar, which had formerly left across his face the prismatic colors of the rainbow, had disappeared.

The most delicate attentions continued to be lavished on the two wounded men, and on the day when each was well enough to rise, he found a *robe-de-chambre* on the arm of his easy-chair ; on the day when he was able to dress himself, a complete suit of clothes ; moreover, in the pocket of each doublet was a well-filled purse, which they each intended, as a matter of course, to return, in time and place, to the unknown protector who watched over them.

This unknown protector could not be the prince with whom the two young men resided, for not only the prince had never once paid them a visit, but he had not even sent to make any inquiry after them.

A vague hope whispered to each heart that this unknown protector was the woman he loved. The two wounded men therefore awaited with intense impatience the moment when they could go out. La Mole, stronger and sooner cured than Coconnas, could have done so long before, but a kind of tacit convention bound him to his friend.

At length, after two months passed in convalescence and confinement, the long-looked-for day arrived, and about two o'clock in the afternoon, on a fine day in autumn, such as Paris sometimes offers to her astonished population, who have already made up their minds to the winter, the two friends, leaning on each other's arms, quitted the Louvre.

La Mole undertook to be the guide of Coconnas, and Coconnas allowed himself to be guided without resistance or reflection. He knew that his friend meant to conduct him to the unknown doctor's, whose potion (not patented) had cured him in a single night, when all the drugs of Master Ambroise Paré were killing him slowly. He had divided the money in his purse into two parts, and intended a hundred rose-nobles for the unknown Esculapius, to whom his recovery was due. Coconnas was not afraid of death, but Coconnas was not the less satisfied to be alive and well.

La Mole directed his steps towards the Place des Halles. Near the ancient fountain was an octagon stone building, surmounted by a vast lantern of wood, which was again surmounted by a pointed roof, on the top of which was a weathercock. This wooden lantern had eight openings, traversed, as that heraldic piece which they call the *fascis* traverses the field of blazonry, by a kind of wheel of wood, which was divided in the middle, in order to admit in the holes cut in it for that purpose the head and hands of the sentenced person or persons who were exposed at one or other of all these eight openings.

This singular construction, which had nothing like it in the surrounding buildings, was called the pillory.

An ill-constructed, irregular, crooked, one-eyed, limping house, the roof covered with moss, like the skin of a leper, had, like a toadstool, sprung up at the foot of this species of tower.

This house was the executioner's.

A man was exposed, and was thrusting out his tongue at the passers-by ; he was one of the robbers who had been following his profession beneath the gibbet of Montfaucon, and had by ill-luck been arrested in the exercise of his functions.

Coconnas believed that his friend had brought him to see this singular spectacle, and mingled in the crowd of amateurs who replied to the grimaces of the patient by vociferations and shouts. Coconnas was naturally cruel, and the sight very much amused him ; and when the moving lantern was turning on its base, in order to show the exhibited to another portion of the multitude, and the crowd were following, Coconnas would have accompanied them, had not La Mole checked him, saying,in a low tone :

"It was not for this that we came here." And he led Coconnas to a small window in the house which abutted on the tower, and at which a man was leaning.

"Ah—ah ! is it you, messeigneurs ?" said the man, raising his blood-red cap, and showing his black and thick hair, which descended to his eyebrows. "You are welcome."

"Who is this man ?" inquired Coconnas, endeavoring to recollect, for he believed he had seen his face during one of the crises of his fever.

"Your preserver, my dear friend," replied La Mole ; "he who brought to you at the Louvre that refreshing drink which did you so much good."

"Oh, oh !" said Coconnas; "in that case, my friend——"

And he held out his hand to him.

But the man, instead of returning the gesture, stood up and retreated a pace from the two friends.

"Sir," he said to Coconnas, "thanks for the honor you offer me, but it is most probable that if you knew me, you would not vouchsafe it."

"*Ma foi!*" said Coconnas; "I declare that, even if you were the devil himself, I am very greatly obliged to you, for I owe you my life."

"I am not exactly the devil," replied the man in the red cap; "but yet there are frequently persons who would rather see the devil than me."

"Then, who are you?" asked Coconnas.

"Sir," replied the man, "I am Maître Caboche, the executioner of the provostry of Paris——"

"Ah——" said Coconnas, withdrawing his hand.

"You see!" said Maître Caboche.

"No, no; I will touch your hand, or may the devil fetch me! Hold it out——"

"Really?"

"Most certainly."

"Here it is!"

"Open it—wider—wider!"

And Coconnas took from his pocket the handful of gold he had prepared for his anonymous physician, and placed it in the executioner's hand.

"I would rather have had your hand entirely and solely!" said Maître Caboche, shaking his head; "for I am not in want of money, but of hands to touch mine. Never mind! God bless you, gentlemen!"

"So, then, my friend," said Coconnas, looking at the executioner with curiosity, "it is you who give men pain, who put them on the wheel, rack them, cut off heads, and break bones. Ah, ah! I am very glad to have formed your acquaintance."

"Sir," said Maître Caboche, "I do not do all myself: just as you have lackeys, you noble gentlemen, to do what you do not choose to do yourself, so have I my assistants, who do the coarser work and make preparations. Only when, by chance, I have to do with folks of quality, like you and that other gentleman, for instance, ah! it is then a very different thing, and I take a pride in doing everything myself, from first to last—that is to say, from the first putting of the *question*, to the beheading!"

In spite of himself, Coconnas felt a shudder pervade his veins, as if the actual wedge was being driven beside his legs—as if the edge of the ax was against his neck.

La Mole, without being able to account for it, felt the same sensation. But Coconnas overcame the emotion, of which he was ashamed, and desirous of taking leave of Maître Caboche with a jest on his lips, said to him:

"Well, master, I hold you to your word, and when it is my turn to mount the gallows of Enguerrand de Marigny, or the scaffold of M. de Nemours, you alone shall lay hands on me."

"I promise you."

"Then, this time here is my hand, as a pledge that I accept your promise," said Coconnas.

And he extended to the headsman his hand, which the headsman touched timidly with his own, although it was evident that he had a great desire to grasp it warmly.

At this slight touch, Coconnas turned rather pale; but a smile still remained on his lips, whilst La Mole, ill at ease, and seeing the crowd turn with the lantern and come towards them, touched his cloak.

Coconnas, who in reality had as great desire as La Mole to put an end to this scene, nodded to the executioner, and went his way.

"*Ma foi!*" said La Mole, when he and his companion had reached the Cross de Trahoir, "we breathe more freely here than in the Place des Halles!"

"Decidedly," replied Coconnas; "but I am not the less glad at having made Maître Caboche's acquaintance. It is well to have friends everywhere."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE ABODE OF MAÎTRE RENÉ, PERFUMER TO THE QUEEN-MOTHER.

At the period of this history there existed in Paris, for passing from one part of the city to another, but five bridges, some of stone and the others of wood, and they all led to the Cité; amongst these five bridges, each of which has its history, we shall now speak more particularly of the Pont-Saint-Michel.

In the midst of the houses which bordered the line of the bridge, facing a small islet, was a house remarkable for its panels of wood, over which a large roof impended, like the lid of an immense eye. At the only window which opened on the first story, over the window and door of the ground-floor, closely shut, was observable a reddish light, which attracted the attention of the passers-by to the low façade, large, and painted blue, with rich gold mouldings. A kind of frieze, which separated the ground-floor from the first-floor, represented groups of devils in the most grotesque postures imaginable; and a large plain strip, painted blue like the façade, ran between the frieze and the window, with this inscription: "René, Florentine, Perfumer to Her Majesty, the Queen-Motlier."

The door of this shop was, as we have said, closely bolted; but it was defended from nocturnal attacks better than by bolts, by the reputation of its occupant, so redoubtable that the passengers over the bridge usually kept away from contact with the building, as if they feared the very smell of the perfumes that might exhale from the house.

From similar motives, the neighbors right and left of René had quitted their houses, which were thus entirely deserted; yet, in spite of this solitude, belated passers by had frequently seen, glittering through the crevices of the shutters of these empty habitations, certain rays of light, and had heard certain noises like groans, which proved that some beings frequented these abodes, although they did not know if they belonged to this world or the other.

It was, doubtless, owing to the privilege which the dread of him, widely circulated, had procured for him, that Maître René had dared to keep up a light after the prescribed hour. No round or guard, however, would have dared to molest him, a man doubly dear to her majesty as her fellow-countryman and perfumer.

The shop of the ground-floor had been dark and deserted since eight o'clock in the evening—the hour at which it closed, not again to open until next morning, and it was there was the daily sale of perfumery, unguents, cosmetics, and all the articles of a skilful chemist. Two apprentices aided him in the retail business, but did not sleep in the house.

In the evening they went out an instant before the shop was closed, and in the morning waited at the door until it was opened.

In the shop, which was large and deep, there were two doors, each leading to a staircase. One of these staircases was in the wall itself, and the other was exterior, and visible from the Quai des Augustins, and from what is now called the Quai des Orfevres.

Both led to a room on the first-floor, of the same size as the ground-floor, except that it was divided into two compartments by tapestry suspended in the center. At the end of the first compartment opened the door which led to the exterior staircase. On the side face of the second opened the door of the secret staircase. This door was invisible; being concealed by a large carved cupboard fastened to it by iron cramps, and moving with it when pushed open. Catherine alone, besides René, knew the secret of this door, and by it she came and departed; and with eye or ear placed against the cupboard, in which were several small holes, she saw and heard all that passed in the chamber.

Two other doors, visible to all eyes, presented themselves at the sides of the second compartment. One opened to a small chamber lighted from the roof, and having nothing in it but a large stove, alembics, retorts, and crucibles: it was an alchemist's laboratory; the other opened on to a cell more singular than the rest of the apartment, for it was not lighted at all—had neither carpet nor furniture, but only a kind of stone altar.

The floor sloped from the center to the ends, and from the ends to the base of the wall was a kind of gutter ending in a funnel, through whose orifice might be seen the somber waters of the Seine. On nails driven into the walls were suspended instruments of singular shape, all keen and trenchant, with points as fine as a needle and edges as sharp as a razor: some shone like mirrors; others, on the contrary, were of a dull gray or murky blue. In a corner were two black fowls, struggling with each other and tied together by the claws. This was the Sanctuary of Augury.

Let us return to the middle chamber, that with two compartments.

It was here that the vulgar clients were introduced: here were Ibises of Egypt; mummies, with gilded bands; the crocodile, yawning from the ceiling; death's heads, with eyeless sockets and gumless teeth; and here, old musty volumes, torn and rat-eaten, were presented to the eye of the visitor in pell-mell confusion. Behind the curtain were phials, singularly shaped boxes, and vases of curious construction; all lighted up by two small silver lamps which, supplied with perfumed oil, cast their yellow flame around the somber vault, to which each was suspended by three blackened chains.

René, alone, his arms crossed, was pacing up and down the second compartment with long strides, and shaking his head. After a lengthened and painful musing he paused before an hour-glass.

"Ah! ah!" he said, "I forgot to turn it; and perhaps the sand has all passed a long time since."

Then, looking at the moon, as it struggled through a heavy black cloud which seemed to hang over Nôtre-Dame, he said: "It is nine o'clock. If she comes, she will come, as usual, in an hour or an hour and a half; then there will be time for all."

At this moment a noise was heard on the bridge. René applied his ear to the long tube, the extremity of which reached unto the street.

"No," he said, "it is neither *she* nor *they*: it is men's footsteps, and they stop at my door—they are coming hither."

And three knocks were heard at the door.

René rapidly descended, and placed his ear against the door, without opening it.

The blows were repeated.

"Who's there?" asked René.

"Is it necessary that we should mention our names?" inquired a voice.

"Absolutely indispensable," replied René.

"Then, I am the Count Annibal de Coconnas," said the same voice.

"And I am the Count Lerac de la Mole," said another voice.

"Wait, wait a second, gentlemen, and I am at your service;" and at the same moment, René, drawing the bolts and lifting the bars, opened the door to the two young men only, locking it after him. Then, conducting them by the exterior staircase, he introduced them into the second compartment.

La Mole, as he entered, made the sign of the cross under his cloak. He was pale, and his hand trembled without his being able to repress this symptom of weakness.

Coconnas looked at everything, one after the other; and seeing the door of the cell, tried to open it.

"Allow me to observe, sir," said René, in a serious tone, and placing his hand on Coconnas', "that those who do me the honor of a visit, have only access to this apartment."

"Oh, very well," replied Coconnas; "besides, I want to sit down," and he placed himself on a chair.

There was profound silence for the next minute—Maître René expecting that one or other of the young men would open the conversation.

"Maître René," at length said Coconnas, "you are a very skilful man, and I pray you tell me if I shall always remain a sufferer from my wound—that is, always experience this shortness of breath, which prevents me from riding on horseback, practising feats of arms, and eating rich omelettes?"

René put his ear to Coconnas' chest, and listened attentively to the play of the lungs.

"No, comte," he replied, "you will be cured."

"Really?"

"Yes, I assure you."

"Well, I am happy to hear it."

Again, all was silent.

"Is there nothing else you would desire to know, M. le Comte?"

"I wish to know," said Coconnas, "if I am really in love?"

"You are," replied René.

"How do you know?"

"Because you ask the question."

"*Mordi!* you are right. But with whom?"

"With her who now, on every occasion, uses the oath you have just uttered."

"Ah!" said Coconnas, amazed; "Maître René, you are a wonderful man! Now, La Mole, it is your turn."

La Mole blushed, and seemed embarrassed.

"I, M. René," he stammered, and speaking more firmly as he proceeded, "do not desire to ask you if I am in love, for I know that I am, and do not seek to conceal it from myself: but tell me, shall I be beloved in return? for, in truth, all that at first seemed propitious now turns against me."

"Perchance you have not done all you should do."

"What is there to do, sir, but to testify, by our respect and devotion to the lady of our thoughts, that she is really and profoundly beloved?"

"You know," replied René, "that these demonstrations are frequently very insignificant."

"Then must I despair?"

"By no means; we must have recourse to science. There are in human nature antipathies to be overcome—sympathies which may be forced. Iron is not the loadstone; but by impregnating it, we make it, in its turn, attract iron."

"Yes, yes," muttered La Mole; "but I have an objection to all these sorceries."

"Ah, then, if you have any such objections, you should not come here," answered René.

"Come, come, this is child's play!" interposed Coconnas. "Maître René, can you show me the devil?"

"No, M. le Comte."

"I'm sorry for that; for I had a question or two to put to his dark highness, and it might have encouraged La Mole."

"Well, then, let it be so," said La Mole, "let us go to the point at once. They have spoken to me of figures modeled in wax after the resemblance of the beloved object. Is this a method?"

"An infallible one."

"And in the experiment, there is nothing which can in any way affect the life or health of the person beloved?"

"Nothing."

"Let us try, then."

"Shall I make first trial?" said Coconnas.

"No," said La Mole, "since I have begun, I will go through to the end."

At this moment, some one rapped lightly at the door—so lightly that Maître René alone heard the noise for which he had been awaiting.

He put, without any hesitation, his ear to the pipe, whilst he made several inquiries of La Mole. Then he added, suddenly:

"And then think well of your wish, and call the person whom you love."

La Mole knelt, as if about to name a divinity; and René, going into the other compartment, went out noiselessly by the exterior staircase, and an instant afterwards, light steps trod the flooring of his shop.

La Mole rose, and beheld before him Maître René. The Florentine held in his hand a small figure in wax, very indifferently modeled, and wearing a crown and mantle.

"Do you desire to be always beloved by your royal mistress?" demanded the perfumer.

"Yes, if my life—my soul, should be the sacrifice!" replied La Mole.

"Well," said the Florentine, taking with the ends of his finger some drops of water from an ewer, sprinkling them over the figure, and muttering certain Latin words.

La Mole shuddered, believing that some sacrilege was being committed.

"What are you doing?" he inquired.

"I am christening this figure with the name of Marguerite."

"For what purpose?"

"To establish a sympathy."

René then traced on a small strip of red paper certain cabalistic characters, put it into the eye of a steel needle, and with the needle pierced the small wax model in the heart.

Strange to say, at the orifice of the wound appeared a small drop of blood, and then he burnt a piece of paper.

The warmth of the needle melted the wax, and dried up the spot of blood.

"Thus," said René, "by the force of sympathy, your love shall pierce and burn the heart of the woman whom you love."

Coconnas, as the bolder spirit of the two, laughed, and in a low tone jested at the whole affair; but La Mole, amorous and superstitious, felt a cold dew start from the roots of his hair.

"And now," continued René, "press your lips to the lips of the figure, and say: 'Marguerite, I love thee! Come, Marguerite, come!'"

La Mole obeyed.

At this moment they heard the door of the second chamber open, and light steps approach. Coconnas, curious and incredulous, drew his poniard, and fearing a rebuke from René if he raised the tapestry, cut a small piece out with his dagger, and applying his eye to the hole, uttered a cry of astonishment, to which two female voices responded.

"What is it?" exclaimed La Mole, nearly dropping the waxen figure, which René caught from his hands.

"Why," replied Coconnas, "the Duchesse de Nevers and Madame Marguerite are there!"

"Well, then, incredulous!" replied René, with an austere smile, "do you still doubt the force of sympathy?"

La Mole was petrified on seeing the Queen; Coconnas was amazed at beholding Madame de Nevers. One believed that the sorceries of René had evoked the specter of Marguerite: the other, seeing the door half open, by which the lovely phantoms had entered, gave at once a worldly and substantial explanation to the mystery.

Whilst La Mole was crossing himself and sighing, Coconnas, who had driven away all ideas of the interference of the foul fiend by the aid of his strong powers of incredulity, having observed, through the chink in the curtain, the astonishment of Madame de Nevers and the somewhat caustic smile of Marguerite, judged it to be a decisive moment, and understanding that a man may say in behalf of a friend what he cannot say for himself, instead of going to Madame de Nevers, went straight to Marguerite, and bending his knee, after the fashion of the great Artaxerxes, cried, in a voice not deficient in effect:

"Madame, this very moment, at the demand of my friend the Count de la Mole, Maître René evoked your spirit; and to my utter astonishment, your spirit is accompanied with a body most dear to us, and which I recommend to my friend. Shade of her majesty the Queen of Navarre, will you desire the body of your companion to come on the other side of the curtain?"

Marguerite laughed heartily, and made a sign to Henriette, who passed to the other side of the curtain.

"La Mole, my friend," continued Coconnas, "be as eloquent as Demosthenes, as Cicero, as the Chancellor de l'Hôpital! and be assured that my life will be perilled if you do not persuade the body of Madame de Nevers that I am her most devoted, most obedient, and most faithful servant."

"But——" stammered La Mole.

"Do as I desire! And you, Maître René, watch that we are not interrupted."

René did as Coconnas desired him.

"*Mordi!* sir," said Marguerite, "you are a man of sense. I listen to you. What have you to say?"

"I have to say to you, madame, that the shadow of my friend—for he is a shadow, and he proves it by not uttering a single syllable—I say, then, that this shadow has supplicated me to use the faculty which material bodies possess, and to say to you: Lovely Shadow, the gentleman who thus lost his corporeality has lost it by the rigor of your eyes. If you were yourself, I would ask Maítre René to plunge me in some sulphureous hole rather than hold such language to the daughter of Henry II., the sister of King Charles IX., and the wife of the King of Navarre. But shadows are freed from all terrestrial pride, and are never haughty when they love. Therefore, pray of your body, madame, to bestow a little love on poor La Mole—a soul in trouble, if ever there was one; a soul first persecuted by friendship, which three times thrust into him several inches of cold steel; a soul burnt by the fire of your eyes—fire a thousand times more consuming than all the flames of Tartarus! Have pity, then, on this poor soul! Love a little what was the handsome La Mole; and if you no longer possess speech, ah! bestow a gesture, a smile upon him. The soul of my friend is a very intelligent soul, and will easily comprehend. Be kind to him, then; or, *mordi!* I will pass my sword through the body of René, in order that, by virtue of the power which he possesses over spirits, he may force yours, which he has already so opportunely evoked, to do all a shadow so amiably disposed as yours appears to be, should do."

Marguerite could not repress a burst of laughter at this tirade; yet, preserving the silence which, on such an occasion, may be supposed characteristic of a royal shade, she presented her hand to Coconnas, who took it tenderly in his own, and, calling to La Mole, said:

"Shade of my friend, come hither instantly!"

La Mole, amazed, overcome, silently obeyed.

"'Tis well," said Coconnas, taking him by the back of the head; "and now bring the shadow of your handsome brown countenance into contact with the white and vaporous hand before you."

And Coconnas, suiting the "action to the word," placed this most delicate hand to La Mole's lips, and kept them for a moment respectfully united, without the hand seeking to withdraw itself from the gentle pressure.

La Mole then, summoning his presence of mind, suddenly rose, and leaving the hand of Marguerite in that of Coconnas, took himself that of the Duchess de Nevers, and bending his knee, said :

"Loveliest—most adorable of women—I speak of living women, and not of shadows !" and he turned a look and a smile to Marguerite ; "allow a soul released from its mortal trappings to repair the absence of a body fully absorbed by material friendship. M. de Coconnas, whom you see, is but a man—a man of bold and hardy frame, of flesh handsome to gaze upon perchance, but perishable, like all flesh. Yet although a stalwart and right knightly gentleman, who, as you have seen, distributes as heavy blows as were ever seen in wide France—this champion, so full of eloquence in presence of a spirit, dares not accost a female body in the flesh. 'Tis therefore he has addressed the shadow of the queen, charging me to speak to your lovely body, and to tell you that he lays at your feet his soul and heart ; that he entreats from your divine eyes a look in pity—from your rosy fingers, to beckon him with a sign, and from your musical and heavenly voice to say those words which he never can forget ; if not, he has supplicated another thing—and that is, in case he should not soften you, you will pass, for the second time, my sword—which is a real blade, for swords have no shadows but in the sunshine—pass my sword right through his body, for he can live no longer if you do not authorize him to live exclusively for you."

Henriette's eyes (she herself had been a little jealous of Coconnas's address to the Queen of Navarre) turned from La Mole, to whom she had listened, towards Coconnas, to see if the expression of that gentleman's countenance harmonized with the loveful address of his friend. It seemed that she was satisfied, for blushing, breathless, conquered, she said to Coconnas, with a smile, which disclosed a double row of pearls enclosed in coral :

"Is this true ?"

"*Mordi!*" exclaimed Coconnas, fascinated by her look, "it is true, indeed. Oh, yes, madame, it is true—true on my life—true on my death!"

"There, then," said Henriette extending to him her hand whilst her eyes proclaimed the feelings of her heart.

Coconnas and La Mole each approached his lady-love, when suddenly the door at the bottom opened, and René appeared.

"Silence!" he exclaimed, in a voice which at once damped all the ardor of the lovers; "silence!"

And they heard in the solid wall the sound of a key in a lock, and of a door grating on its hinges.

"But," said Marguerite, haughtily, "I should think that no one has the right to enter whilst we are here!"

"Not the queen-mother?" murmured René in her ear.

Marguerite instantly rushed out by the exterior staircase, leading La Mole after her; Henriette and Coconnas followed them.

They all four fled, as fly at the first noise the birds we have seen engaged in loving parley on the boughs of a flowering shrub.

CHAPTER XX.

THE BLACK HENS.

It was time for the two couples to disappear. Catherine turned the key in the lock, just as Coconnas and Madame de Nevers closed the secret door, and Catherine could hear their steps on the stairs.

She cast a suspicious glance around, and then fixing her eyes on René, who stood motionless before her, said:

"Who was that?"

"Only some lovers, who are quite content with the assurance I gave them, that they are really in love."

"Never mind them," said Catherine, shrugging her shoulders; "is there no one here?"

"No one but your majesty and myself."

"Have you done what I ordered you ?"

"About the two black hens ?"

"Yes !"

"They are ready, madame ?"

"Ah," muttered Catherine, "if you were a Jew !"

"Why a Jew, madame ?"

"Because you could then read the Hebrew treatises concerning sacrifices. I have had one of them translated, and I found that it was not in the heart or liver that the Hebrews sought for omens ; but in the brain, and the letters traced there by the all-powerful hand of destiny."

"Yes, madame ; so I have heard from an old rabbi."

"There are," said Catherine, "characters thus marked that reveal all the future. Only the Chaldean seers recommend——"

"What ?" asked René, seeing the queen hesitate.

"That the experiment shall be tried on the human brain, as more developed and more nearly sympathizing with the wishes of the consulter."

"Alas !" said René, "Your majesty knows it is impossible."

"Difficult, at least," said Catherine ; "if we had known this at the St. Bartholomew, what a rich harvest we might have had. But I will think of it the first time anybody is to be hanged. Meantime, let us do what we can. Is the chamber of sacrifice prepared ?"

"Yes, madame."

"Let us go there."

René lighted a taper made of strange substances, and emitting strong odors, and preceded Catherine into the cell.

Catherine selected from amongst the sacrificial instruments a knife of blue steel, whilst René took up one of the fowls that were crouched in the corner.

"How shall we proceed ?"

"We will examine the liver of the one and the brain of the other. If these two experiments lead to the same result with the former, we must needs be convinced."

"With which shall we commence?"

"With the liver."

"Very well," said René, and he fastened the bird down to two rings attached to the little altar, so that the creature, turned on its back, could only struggle, without stirring from the spot.

Catherine opened its breast with a single stroke of her knife; the fowl uttered three cries, and, after some convulsions, expired.

"Always three cries!" said Catherine; "three signs of death."

She then opened the body.

"And the liver inclining to the left—always to the left, a triple death, followed by a downfall. 'Tis terrible, René."

"We must see, madame, whether the presages from the second correspond with those of the first."

René threw the dead fowl into a corner, and went towards the other, which, endeavoring to escape, and seeing itself pent up in a corner, flew suddenly over René's head, and in its flight extinguished the magic taper Catherine held.

"Thus shall our race be extinguished," said the queen: "death shall breathe upon it, and destroy it from the face of the earth! Yet three sons! three sons!" she murmured, sorrowfully.

René took from her the extinguished taper, and went to relight it.

On his return, he found the hen huddled in a corner.

"This time," said Catherine, "I will prevent the cries, for I will cut off the head at once."

And accordingly, as soon as the hen was bound, Catherine severed the head at a single blow; but in the last agony the beak opened three times, and then closed forever.

"Seest thou," said Catherine, terrified, "instead of three cries, three sighs?—they will all three die. Let us now see the brain."

She severed the comb from the head, and carefully opening the skull, endeavored to trace a letter formed in the bloody cavities that divide the brain.

"Always so!" cried she, clasping her hands; "and this time clearer than ever; see here!"

René approached.

"What is this letter?" asked Catherine.

"An H," replied René.

"How many times repeated?"

"Four," said he.

"Ay, ay! I see it! that is to say, HENRY IV. Oh," cried she, casting the knife from her, "I am accursed in my posterity!"

She was terrible, that woman, pale as a corpse, lighted by the dismal taper, and clasping her bloody hands.

"He will reign!" she exclaimed; "he will reign!"

"He will reign!" repeated René, buried in meditation.

The gloomy expression of Catherine's face soon disappeared before a sudden thought had passed through her mind.

"René," said she, without lifting her head from her breast, "René, do you recollect the terrible history of a doctor at Perugia, who killed at once, by the aid of a pomade, his daughter and his daughter's lover?"

"Yes, madame."

"And this lover——"

"Was King Ladislaus, madame."

"Ah, yes!" murmured she; "have you any account of this history?"

"I have an old book that mentions it," replied René.

"Well, let us go into the other chamber, and then you can show it me."

They quitted the cell, the door of which René closed after him

"Has your majesty any other orders to give me concerning the sacrifices?"

"No, René, none; I am sufficiently satisfied for the present; only the next execution you must arrange with the executioner for the head."

René bowed and approached the shelves, where stood the books, reached down one of them, opened it, turned over the leaves an instant, and then handed it to the queen-mother.

Catherine sat down at a table, René placed the magic taper close to her, and by its dim and vivid glare she read a few lines.

"Good!" said she; "this is all I wanted to know."

She rose from her seat, leaving the book on the table, but bearing away the idea that had germinated in her mind, and which would ripen there.

René waited respectfully, taper in hand, until the queen, who seemed about to retire, should give him fresh orders or ask fresh questions.

Catherine walked up and down several times without speaking. Then suddenly stopping before René, and fixing on him her eyes, round and piercing as those of a bird of prey:

"Confess you have given her some love-draught," said she.

"Whom?" asked René, starting.

"La Sauve."

"I, madame?" said René; "never!"

"Never?"

"I swear it."

"There must be some magic in it, however, for he is desperately in love with her, though he is not famous for his constancy."

"Who, madame?"

"He, Henry, the accursed—he who is to succeed my three sons—he who shall one day sit upon the throne of France, and be called Henry IV., and is yet the son of Jeanne d'Albret."

And Catherine accompanied these words with a sigh that made René shudder, for he thought of the famous gloves he had prepared by Catherine's order for the Queen of Navarre.

"He runs after her still, then?" said René.

"Still," replied the queen.

"I thought that the King of Navarre was quite in love with his wife now."

"All a farce, René. I know not why, but everybody is seeking to deceive me. My daughter Marguerite is leagued against me; perhaps she, too, is looking forward to her brother's death; perhaps she, too, hopes to be Queen of France."

"Perhaps so," re-echoed René, resuming his own reverie.

"Ha! we shall see," said Catherine, advancing towards the great door, for she doubtless judged it useless to descend the secret stair, after René's assurance that they were alone.

René preceded her, and in a few minutes they stood in the laboratory of the perfumer.

"You promised me some fresh cosmetics for my hands and lips, René; the winter is approaching, and you know how tender my skin is."

"I have already thought of that, madame; and I intended to bring you some to-morrow."

"I shall not be visible before nine o'clock to-morrow evening; I shall be occupied with my devotions during the day."

"I will be at the Louvre at nine o'clock, then, madame."

"Madame de Sauve has beautiful hands and lips," said Catherine, in a careless tone. "What pomade does she use?"

"Heliotrope."

"For her hands?"

"Yes."

"What for her lips?"

"She is going to try a new composition of my invention, and of which I intended to bring your majesty a box at the same time."

Catherine mused an instant.

"She is certainly very beautiful," said she, pursuing her secret thoughts, "and the passion of the Béarnais for her is astonishing."

"And so devoted to your majesty," said René.

Catherine shrugged his shoulders.

"When a woman loves, is she faithful to any one but her lover?—You must have given her some love-spell, René."

"I swear I have not, madame."

"Well, well; we'll say no more about it. Show me this opiate you spoke of, that is to make her lips still more rosy."

René approached a drawer, and showed Catherine six small silver boxes of a round shape, ranged side by side.

"This is the only spell she ever asked me for," observed René; "it is true, as your majesty says, I have composed it expressly for her, for her lips are so tender that the sun and wind affect them equally."

Catherine opened one of the boxes; it contained a beautiful carmine paste.

"Give me some paste for my hands, René," said she; "I will take it away with me, for I have none."

René took the taper, and went to seek, in a private drawer, what the queen asked for. As he turned, he fancied that he saw the queen conceal a box under her mantle; he was, however, too familiar with these habits of the queen to affect to perceive the movement; so wrapping the cosmetic she demanded in a paper bag, ornamented with fleurs-de-lis:

"Here it is, madame," he said.

"Thanks, René," returned the queen: then, after a moment's silence: "Do not give Madame de Sauve that paste for a few days; I wish to make the first trial of it myself."

And she approached the door.

"Shall I have the honor of escorting your majesty?" asked René.

"Only to the end of the bridge," replied Catherine; "my gentlemen and my litter wait for me there."

They left the house, and at the end of the Rue Barillerie four gentlemen on horseback and a plain litter were in attendance.

On his return, René's first care was to count his boxes of opiates—one was wanting.

CHAPTER XXI.

MADAME DE SAUVE'S CHAMBER.

Catherine had calculated rightly in supposing that Henry would speedily resume his habit of passing his evenings with Madame de Sauve. 'Tis true that the utmost caution was at first observed in making these visits, but by degrees all precaution was laid aside, and so openly did the King of Navarre avow his preference for the society of Madame de Sauve, that Catherine experienced not the smallest difficulty in ascertaining that, however her daughter Marguerite might claim the title of his queen, the real sovereign of his affections was the fair Charlotte.

We have already made a slight mention of these apartments, but for the reader's better information, we will state that they were situated on the second floor of the palace, almost immediately above those occupied by Henry himself, and in common with the suites of rooms occupied by such as were officially employed by the royal family, were small, dark, and inconvenient; the door opened upon a corridor, feebly lighted by an arched window at the further end, but so completely did the cumbrous sashes interfere with the purpose for which the window in question had been, no doubt, originally intended, that it was only during a few hours of a sunshiny day that a few straggling rays gained admittance; during winter it was necessary to light the lamp placed at the end by two o'clock in the day, and the said lamp only containing a certain portion of oil, it followed, as a matter of course, that by the hour of Henry's usual visit, it was exhausted, leaving the whole corridor in a state of darkness.

The suite of rooms devoted to the service of Madame de Sauve consisted of a small antechamber, hung with yellow damask ; a receiving-room, with hangings of blue velvet ; a sleeping-room, with its bed of curiously carved wood, heavy curtains of rose-colored satin, and tester composed of looking-glass, set in silver, and paintings representing the loves of Venus and Adonis ; such was the residence, or rather nest, of the lovely Charlotte de la Sauve, lady-in-waiting to her majesty Queen Catherine.

A more careful examination of the apartments we have just been describing discovered a toilet abundantly and luxuriously provided with all the accessories of female beauty, nearly opposite to which was a small door opening into a kind of oratory, where, at an elevation of two steps from the ground, stood a carved *prie-dieu.* Against the walls were suspended three or four paintings, representing the most striking passages in the lives of the saints, mingled with arms for female use, both offensive and defensive ; for in these times of mysterious intrigue, women carried arms as well as men, and very frequently employed them as skilfully.

The evening on which we have introduced the reader to Madame de Sauve's apartments was the one following the scenes in which Maître René had played so conspicuous a part ; and the fair Charlotte, seated beside Henry in her sleeping chamber, was eloquently discoursing of her fears and affection, and touched on the devotion she had exhibited the night succeeding the massacre of St. Bartholomew—the only night Henry had passed in Marguerite's apartments.

Henry, meanwhile, though duly grateful for the deep interest expressed for him by the beautiful creature, who looked more than usually captivating in the simple white peignoir in which she was robed, was more grave and thoughtful than exactly satisfied Madame de Sauve, who had strictly obeyed Catherine's injunctions to evince the most extreme affection for Henry. She eagerly and searchingly gazed upon him, as though to ascertain how far his words and looks agreed.

"Charlotte," said Henry, at last, roused by her manner from his meditative mood, "there is one question I want to ask you, and I trust to you to answer me truly. How comes it that, all at once, I find you listening so readily to my suit, and lavishing upon so unworthy a creature as myself the rich treasures of that love I so earnestly, though vainly, sought to obtain before my marriage? Something whispers to me that I am indebted to the interference of her majesty Queen Catherine for the delightful change I experience."

Madame blushed, and hastily exclaimed, "For Heaven's sake, speak not so loud when you name the queen-mother!"

"Nay," answered Henry, with such an air of confidence as to deceive even Madame de Sauve herself, "there was a time when such caution was requisite; but now that I am her daughter's husband, the case is different."

"Ah, Henry!" replied Madame de Sauve, "you have been sporting with my credulity in persuading me you love me; 'tis too plain you have bestowed your affections with your hand—on Madame Marguerite."

Henry smiled.

"There!" exclaimed Madame de Sauve, "you smile so provokingly that I feel as though I could quarrel with you, and forbid you ever to see my face again! May I request to be informed what your majesty meant by saying that you owed my love to the orders of the queen-mother?"

"Why, I meant this, sweetheart, and nothing more: that, though your heart felt inclined to return my love, you durst not listen to its dictates till authorized by Catherine herself. But be content, and believe that I fully return your affection; and for that reason, I will not confide to you the secret working of my thoughts, lest you should be a sufferer; for the friendship of the queen is unstable—there is no dependence on it—it is just the uncertain, changeable regard of a mother-in-law."

This was not the point at which Charlotte aimed; and it seemed to her as though an impenetrable barrier arose to separate her from her lover directly she attempted to sound the fathomless recesses of his heart. Her eyes filled with tears, but just as she was about to reply, ten o'clock struck.

"Your majesty will pardon me for reminding you that it is late; and I am required to be early in my attendance on the queen-mother to-morrow morning."

"In other words, you are tired of my company, and want to get rid of me; eh, pretty one? Is it not so?" said Henry.

"Nay," answered Charlotte, "I am somewhat indisposed to-night; and as I fear I may be led to say what it may displease your majesty to hear, I would humbly request you to retire, and leave me to my own sad thoughts."

"Well!" cried Henry, "be it as you will; but by way of recompense for my obedience, will you not allow me to be present while that beautiful hair is arranged for the night?"

"Does not your majesty fear the displeasure of Queen Marguerite, should you protract your departure?"

"Charlotte," answered Henry, with a serious air, "we agreed never to allude to or mention the name of the Queen of Navarre, and it seems to me as though, to-night, we had talked of nothing else."

Madame de Sauve arose with a sigh, and seated herself before her toilet-table, while Henry, drawing a chair beside her, placed one knee on the seat, and leaning on the back, exclaimed:

"Mercy on us! what a heap of wonderful things you have here, my pretty Charlotte!—scent-bottles, powders, pots of perfume, odoriferous pastiles, phials, washes. Who would think so many accessories were requisite ere beauty could be made perfect?"

"Still," replied Charlotte, "it seems that my toilet lacks the one needful embellishment that would enable me to reign exclusively over your majesty's heart!"

"Come, come, sweetheart," interrupted Henry, "do not let us fall back upon past subjects, but tell me—for I am dying to know—what is the use of this delicately small pencil? Now, if I were good at guessing, I would venture to ask if it were intended to trace out the arched brow of my beautiful Charlotte?"

"Your majesty has guessed most successfully; 'tis even as you say, for marking more perfectly the form of the eyebrow."

"Then reward my skill by explaining the purport of this little ivory rake?"

"To form a perfect and accurate division of the roots of the hair."

"And this charming little silver box, with the lid so elegantly wrought and embossed?"

"That, sire, was sent to me from René; it contains the lip-salve so long promised by him, to embellish the lips your majesty has ere now deigned to admire."

And, with a view to exhibit the cosmetic in question to Henry, Charlotte took the little box containing it in her hands, but, just as she was about to open it, a sudden knocking at the door made the lovers start.

"Madame," said Dariole, introducing her head through the curtains that hung before the entrance to the chamber, "some one knocks."

"Go, see who it is, and return quickly," said her mistress.

During the absence of the confidante, Henry and Charlotte exchanged looks of considerable alarm; the former contemplating a hasty retreat to the oratory, which had before now afforded him a safe hiding-place when similarly surprised.

"Madame!" cried Dariole, "'tis Maître René, the perfumer."

At this name, a frown darkened the brow of Henry, and his lips were suddenly and involuntarily compressed.

"Shall I send him away?" asked Charlotte.

"By no means," answered Henry; "Maître René is one of those persons who do nothing without a motive; his coming hither is for some design or reason; therefore admit him without hesitation."

"Will your majesty choose to conceal yourself?"

"On no account," replied Henry; "for Master René, from whom nothing is hid, knows perfectly well of my being here."

"But are there not reasons why his presence should be unpleasant to your majesty?"

"No!" answered Henry, vainly striving to conceal his emotion, "none whatever; 'tis true there was a coolness between us; but since the night of St. Bartholemew, we have made up all our differences."

"Show Maître René in," said Madame de Sauve to Dariole.

And the next instant René entered the chamber, casting around him a quick, searching glance, that took in the assembled group as well as every trifling circumstance. He found Madame de Sauve sitting before her toilet, and Henry reclining on the sofa at the opposite end of the room, so that while the full light fell upon Charlotte, Henry remained in shadow.

"Madame," said René, with a sort of respectful freedom —"I come to offer my apologies to you."

"And wherefore, my good René?" asked Madame de Sauve, with that air of pleased coquetry with which a pretty woman beholds the means of rendering her beauty still more striking.

"For having thus long delayed fulfilling my promise of inventing a fresh beautifier for those lovely lips—and——"

"And for deferring the performance of that promise until this very day?—that is what you mean, is it not, my worthy Maître Rene?" inquired Charlotte.

"This day?" repeated René.

"Yes, indeed, 'twas but this evening, not long since, I received this box from you."

"Ah, truly: I had indeed forgotten it," said René, gazing with a singular expression on the small box of lip-salve lying on Madame de Sauve's toilet-table, and which exactly resembled those in his shop; "and may I inquire whether you have yet made trial of it?"

"Not yet: I was just about to do so when you entered."

The countenance of René became thoughtful, a change which did not escape the observation of Henry, whom, indeed, few things escaped.

"What ails you, René?" inquired the king.

"Nothing, sire," answered René. "I was but waiting till your majesty should condescend to address me, ere I took my leave of Madame la Baronne."

"Nay, nay," answered Henry, smilingly, "you need no words of mine to assure yourself that I am always happy to see you. What say you, René?—did you doubt that?"

René glanced around him, and seemed as though searchingly examining each nook and corner of the apartment; then, suddenly ceasing his survey, he so placed himself as to bring both Madame de Sauve and Henry within his gaze.

Warned by that admirable instinct which in Henry formed almost a sixth sense, the king felt persuaded some strange and conflicting struggle was going on in the mind of the perfumer, and hastily turning round, so as to throw his own features into shade, while those of the Florentine were fully revealed, he said:

"By the way, what brings you here so late to-night, Maître René?"

"Have I been so unfortunate as to disturb your majesty by my visit?" replied the perfumer, retreating backwards to the door.

"Not in the least, I promise you; but I should like to know one thing."

"What is that, sire?"

"Whether you expected to find me here?"

"I was quite sure your majesty was nowhere else."

"You were seeking me, probably?"

"I am at least very happy to have met your majesty."

"You have something to say to me?" persisted Henry; "come, come, 'tis useless seeking to deny it."

"'Tis possible I have somewhat to say to your majesty," said René.

Charlotte blushed, and a dread lest the revelation the perfumer seemed tempted to make to Henry might relate to her previous conduct towards the king, made her desirous of cutting short the conversation; feigning, therefore, so entire an absorption in duties of her toilette as not to have heard a word that had passed, she suddenly broke in upon it by exclaiming, as she opened the box of lip-salve :

"René, you are a dear good man, to have made me this beautiful ointment ; and, now I think of it, it will be an excellent opportunity to make use of it while you are here, that you may assist me with your valuable aid and direction as to the right mode of employing it."

So saying, she dipped the tip of her finger in the vermilion paste, and was just about to raise it to her lips.

René shuddered, and half extended his arm to prevent her. The hand of the baronne had almost touched her lips.

Henry, concealed in deep shadow, marked well the action of the one and the start of the other.

René became ghastly pale as the distance between the finger of Charlotte and her lips was diminished to the smallest possible space ; then suddenly springing forwards, he arrested her arm at the very instant that Henry arose with the same intention. The king instantly fell back on the sofa, without the slightest noise.

"One moment, madame!" cried René, with a forced smile, "but this salve must not be used without very particular directions."

"And who will supply me with these directions ?"

"I will."

"And when ?"

"Directly I have finished saying what I have to say to his majesty the King of Navarre."

Charlotte opened her eyes with amazement at the singular and mysterious conversation which was being carried on without her understanding a word of its import, and she continued in mute astonishment, holding the pot of salve in one hand, and gazing on the extremity of the finger tinged by the roseate ointment she had intended for her lips.

Meanwhile, Henry arose, and moved by an idea which, like all the thoughts of the young king, had two sides, the one apparently superficial, and the other deep and profound, went straight to Charlotte, and, taking her hand reddened as it was with the ointment, feigned to be about to carry it to his lips.

"Wait one minute!" exclaimed René, eagerly; "but an instant! Be kind enough, madame, to wash your beautiful hands with this Naples soap, which I quite forgot to send when I sent the salve, but which I now have the honor of presenting to you myself."

And drawing from its silver envelope a cake of greenish colored soap, he put it into a gilt basin, poured water upon it, and bending one knee to the ground, he presented the whole to Madame de Sauve.

"Why, really, Master René," cried Henry, "your gallantry quite astonishes me; you put our court beaux quite out of the field!"

"Oh, what a delicious odor!" exclaimed Charlotte, rubbing her fair hands with the pearly froth that arose from the balmy soap.

René, unmoved by Henry's raillery, continued to fulfil his self-imposed duties with the most rigorous exactitude: putting aside the basin he had held, he presented Charlotte with a towel of the most delicate texture, and when she had thoroughly dried her hands, said:

"And now, my lord, you are at liberty to follow your royal inclination."

Charlotte held out her hand to Henry, who kissed it and returned to his seat, more convinced than ever that something most extraordinary was going on in the mind of the Florentine.

"Well?" said Charlotte.

The Florentine appeared as though trying to collect all his resolution, and after a short hesitation, turned towards Henry.

CHAPTER XXII.

"SIRE, YOU WILL BE KING!"

"SIRE!" said René to Henry, "I wish to speak to you on a matter which has for a long time occupied my attention."

"Of perfumes?" asked Henry, with a smile.

"Well, yes, sire—of perfumes," replied René, with a singular tone of acquiescence.

"Well, then, speak on; for it is a subject which has much interested me."

René looked at the king, endeavoring to read his thoughts, but they were impenetrable; and seeing that his scrutiny was unavailing, he continued:

"One of my friends, sire, has just arrived from Florence: this friend has devoted much of his time to astrology."

"Yes," said Henry, "I know it is a Florentine pursuit."

"And he has, in association with the leading savants of the world, drawn the horoscopes of the principal personages in Europe."

"Indeed!" said Henry.

"And as the house of Bourbon is amongst the leading houses, descending, as it does, from the Comte du Clermont, fifth son of Saint Louis, your majesty may well suppose that yours has not been forgotten."

Henry listened still more attentively; adding, with a smile as indifferent as he could make it: "And do you recollect this horoscope?"

"Oh!" answered René, shaking his head; "your horoscope is one not easily forgotten."

"Really!" said Henry, with an ironical look.

"Yes, sire; your majesty, according to the indications of this horoscope, is called to the most brilliant destiny."

The eyes of the young prince emitted involuntarily a lightning glance, and then as rapidly reassumed its look of indifference.

"All these Italian oracles are flatterers," said Henry, "and he who flatters, lies. Are there not some who say I shall command armies?"

And he burst into loud laughter. But an observer less occupied than René would have marked and comprehended the effort this laugh had cost.

"Sire," said René, coolly, "the horoscope announces better than that."

"Does it announce, that at the head of one of these armies I shall gain battles?"

"Better than that, sire."

"Well, then," said Henry, "at all events I shall be a conqueror."

"Sire, you *will be king!*"

"Eh, *ventre-saint-gris!*" said Henry, repressing a violent palpitation of the heart; "am I not so already?"

"Sire, my friend knows what he promises; not only will you be king, but you will reign."

"And then," said Henry, in the same strain of raillery, "your friend requires ten golden crowns, does he not, René? for such a prophecy, in such times, is indeed an ambitious one. Well, well, René, I am not rich, so I will give your friend five at once, and the other five when the prophecy shall be realized."

"Sire," said René, "allow me to proceed."

"What, is not that all?" said Henry. "Well, if I am an emperor, I will give double."

"Sire, my friend came from Florence with his horoscope, which he has renewed in Paris, and which gives again the same result; and he has confided the secret to me."

"A secret that concerns his majesty?" inquired Charlotte, eagerly.

"I believe so," replied the Florentine.

"Then say it," answered the Baroness de Sauve. "What is it?"

"It is," said the Florentine, weighing each of his words well; "it is in reference to the reports of poisoning which have been circulated for some time at court."

A slight expansion of the nostrils was the only indication which the King of Navarre exhibited of his increased attention at the sudden change in the conversation.

"And does your friend, the Florentine," inquired the king, "know anything of these poisonings?"

"Yes, sire."

"How can you confide to me a secret which is not your own, René; and particularly when the secret is so important?" inquired Henry, in the most natural tone he could assume.

"My friend has some advice to ask of your majesty."

"Of me?"

"What is there astonishing in this, sire? When my friend confided his secret to me, your majesty was the first chief of the Calvinistic party, and M. de Condé the second."

"Well!" observed Henry.

"This friend hoped you would use your all-powerful influence with the Prince de Condé to entreat him not to be hostile towards him."

"Explain yourself, René, if you would have me comprehend you," replied Henry, without manifesting the least alteration in his features or voice.

"Sire, your majesty will comprehend at the first word; this friend knows all the particulars of the attempt to poison Monseigneur the Prince de Condé."

"What! did they attempt to poison the Prince de Condé?" exclaimed Henry, with well-acted surprise. "Indeed! and when was that?"

René looked steadfastly at the king, and replied in these words only:

"Eight days since, your majesty."

"Some enemy?" inquired the king.

"Yes," replied René; "an enemy whom your majesty knows, and who knows your majesty."

"Yes, now I remember," said Henry; "I must have heard talk of this, but I forget the details, which your friend would disclose to me, you say."

"Well, a scented apple was offered to the Prince de Condé, but fortunately his physician was there when it was brought to him: he took it from the messenger, and smelt it. Two days afterwards a gangrenous humor formed in his-face; then an extravasation of blood, and then a cancerous sore which ate into his cheeks, were the price of his devotion or the result of his imprudence."

"Unfortunately, being already half a Catholic," answered Henry, "I have lost all my influence over M. de Condé, and therefore your friend would gain nothing by addressing me."

"It was not only with M. de Condé that your majesty might, by your influence, be useful to my friend, but with the Prince de Porcian, brother of him who was poisoned."

"What!" observed the king, "do you also know the details of the poisoning of the Prince de Porcian?"

"Yes," was the reply. "They knew that he burnt every night a lamp near his bed; they poisoned the oil, and he was stifled with the odor."

Henry clenched his moistened palms together with rage.

"Thus then," he replied, "he whom you term your friend, knows not only the details of this poisoning, but the author of it also?"

"Yes; and that is why he wished to ascertain from you, if you had sufficient influence with the Prince de Porcian to induce him to pardon the murderer of his brother?"

"Unfortunately," replied Henry, "being still half Huguenot I have no influence over the Prince de Porcian; he was wrong, therefore, to address me."

"But what do you think of the inclinations of the Prince de Condé and M. de Porcian?"

"How can I tell their inclinations, René? God has not, that I know, given me the privilege of reading hearts."

"Your majesty may ask yourself the question," said the Florentine, calmly; "has there not been in your majesty's life some event so gloomy, that it may serve as an example of clemency—so painful, that it may be a touchstone for generosity ?"

These words were pronounced in a tone that made Charlotte shudder. The allusion was so direct, so manifest, that the young lady turned aside to hide her flushed face, and avoid Henry's look.

Henry made a powerful effort over himself, smoothed his brow, which, during the Florentine's address, had been heavy with menace, and changing the deep filial grief which weighed upon his heart into an air of vague reflection, said :

"In my life—a gloomy event !—no, René—no ; I only recollect the folly and recklessness of my youth mixed with those fatalities, more or less cruel, which are inflicted on all the frailties of nature, and the trials of God."

René mastered himself, in his turn, and turned his glance from Henry to Charlotte, as if to excite the one and restrain the other—for Charlotte, going towards her toilet to conceal the feeling inspired by this conversation, again extended her hand towards the box of salve.

"But if, sire, you were the brother of the Prince de Porcian, or the brother of the Prince de Condé, and your brother had been poisoned, or your father assassinated ?"

Charlotte uttered a cry, and again was about to apply the salve to her lips. René saw this, but neither stopped her by word nor gesture ; he only said, hastily :

"In the name of heaven, sire, reply ! Sire, if you were in their place, what would you do ?"

Henry collected himself ; wiped, with tremulous hand, his forehead bedewed with drops of cold perspiration, and elevating his figure to its full height, replied in the midst of the breathless silence of René and Charlotte :

"If I were in their place, and were sure of being king—that is to say, of representing God on earth—I would do like God, and forgive !"

"Madame," exclaimed René, snatching the salve from

Madame de Sauve's hand; "madame, give me that box! I see my assistant made a mistake in bringing it to you; to-morrow I will send you another."

CHAPTER XXIII.

A NEW CONVERT.

On the following day there was to be a hunt in the forest of St. Germain. Henry had desired that there should be kept ready, at eight o'clock in the morning, saddled and bridled, a small horse of the Béarn breed, which he intended as a present for Madame de Sauve, but which he first intended to try himself. The horse was duly brought; and as the clock struck eight, Henry descended.

The horse, full of breed and fire, in spite of its small size, was plunging about in the courtyard. It was cold, and a slight hoar frost covered the ground.

Henry was about to cross the courtyard, in order to reach the stables, where the horse and his groom were waiting, when passing before a Swiss soldier, who was on guard at the door, the sentinel presented arms to him, saying:

"God preserve his Majesty the King of Navarre!"

At this wish, and particularly the accent and emphasis of the voice that uttered it, the Béarnais started, and retreated a step, muttering the words, "De Mouy!"

"Yes, sire, De Mouy."

"And what are you doing here?"

"Seeking you."

"What would you?"

"I must speak to your majesty!"

"Rash man!" said the king, going close to him, "do you know that you risk your head?"

"I know it, and I am here."

Henry turned slightly pale, looked around him, and retreated a second time no less quickly than before.

He saw the Duc d'Alençon at a window.

Then, changing his air, Henry took the musket from De Mouy, and appeared to be examining it.

"De Mouy," he said, "it is some very powerful motive that makes you come thus to throw yourself into the wolf's throat."

"It is, sire, and for eight days I have been on the watch. It was only yesterday I learned that your majesty meant to try this horse this morning, and I took my post, accordingly, at this door of the Louvre."

"Why under this costume?"

"The captain of the company is a Protestant, and one of my friends."

"Take your musket, and continue your guard. We are watched. As I return, I will endeavor to say a word to you; but if I do not speak to you, do not stop me. Adieu!"

De Mouy resumed his measured tread, and Henry advanced towards the horse.

"What is that pretty creature?" inquired the Duke d'Alençon, from his window.

"A horse I am going to try this morning."

"But it is not a man's horse."

"It is intended for a pretty woman."

"Be careful, Henry, or you will be indiscreet; for we shall see this pretty woman at the chase, and if I do not know whose chevalier you are, I shall at least learn whose esquire you may be."

"Eh, *mon Dieu!* you will not know," said Henry, with his wonted laugh, "for this pretty woman being very unwell this morning, she cannot ride to-day." And he sprung into the saddle.

"Ah, bah!" said D'Alençon, laughing; "poor Madame de Sauve!"

"François! François—'tis you who are indiscreet."

"And what ails the lovely Charlotte?" inquired the duke.

"Why," answered Henry, "I hardly know. A kind of heaviness in the head, as Dariole informed me—a weakness in all her limbs, a perfect languor."

"And will that prevent you from accompanying us?" inquired D'Alençon.

"Why should it?" was Henry's reply. "You know how madly I love a hunt, and that nothing would make me miss one."

"You will miss this, however, Henry," replied the duke, as he turned round, and after having spoken an instant with some one whom Henry could not see, "for I learn from his majesty that the chase cannot take place."

"Bah!" said Henry, with the most disappointed air in the world; "and why not?"

"Very important letters have arrived from M. de Nevers, and there is a council being held by the king, the queen-mother, and my brother the Duke d'Anjou."

"Ah, ah!" said Henry to himself, "is there any news from Poland?" Then he added, aloud: "In this case it is useless for me to run any more risk on this slippery ground. *Au revoir!* brother." And pulling his horse up short by de Mouy, "My friend," he said, "call one of your comrades to finish your guard. Help the groom to take the saddle off my horse, put it on your head, and carry it to the goldsmith of the royal stable; there is some embroidery to do to it, which he had not time to finish. You can bring me back his answer."

De Mouy hastily obeyed, for the Duke d'Alençon had disappeared from his window, and it was evident he had conceived some suspicion. Scarcely, indeed, had the Huguenot chief left the wicket than the duke appeared. A real Swiss had taken De Mouy's place.

D'Alençon looked attentively at the fresh sentinel, then, turning to Henry:

"This is not the man with whom you were conversing just now, is it, brother?"

"The other was a young fellow of my house, for whom I obtained a post amongst the Swiss. I gave him a commission which he has gone to execute."

"Ah!" said the Duke, as if satisfied with the answer; "and how is Marguerite?"

"I am just going to inquire, brother."

"Haven't you seen her since yesterday?"

"No. I went last night at eleven o'clock; but Gillonne told me she was much fatigued and asleep."

"You will not find her in her apartment. She has gone out."

"Yes," replied Henry, "most likely. She was going to the Convent of the Annonciade."

There was no means of pushing the conversation further, as Henry appeared determined only to reply.

The two brothers-in-law then separated—the Duke d'Alençon to go and hear the news, as he said, and the King of Navarre to return to his apartment.

At the moment the two brothers-in-law separated, some one knocked at the door of Henry's sleeping apartment. He opened the door, gave admittance to De Mouy, and closed the door after him.

"Sire," said De Mouy, "the time for action has arrived. Fear nothing, sire—we are alone; and I will be quick, for time is very precious. Your majesty may now, by a single word, restore to us all that we have lost for our holy religion during this disastrous year. Let us be explicit, let us be brief, let us be frank."

"I listen, my gallant De Mouy," replied the king, seeing that it was impossible any longer to avoid an explanation.

"Is it true that your majesty has abjured the Protestant religion?"

"It is true," said Henry.

"Yes; but is it an abjuration of the lips or of the heart?"

"We are always grateful to God when he has saved our life," replied Henry, not replying directly to the question; "and God has visibly spared me in a most cruel strait and danger."

"But, sire," continued De Mouy, "confess that your abjuration is not a matter of conviction but of calculation. You have abjured that the king may let you live, and not because God has spared your life."

"Whatever may be the cause of my conversion, De Mouy," answered Henry, "I am not the less a Catholic."

"Yes; but shall you always continue one? Should an occasion present itself, would you not relapse? Well, this occasion presents itself at this moment: Rochelle is insurgent; Roussillon and Béarn only await the signal to act, and in Guienne all is ripe for revolt. Only avow that you were a Catholic on compulsion, and I will answer for all the rest."

"My dear De Mouy, a gentleman of my birth is never forced; what I have done, I have done freely."

"But, sire," continued the young man, his heart oppressed at this unexpected resistance; "you do not reflect that in thus abandoning us, you betray us."

Henry remained perfectly unmoved.

"Yes," De Mouy continued; "you betray us, sire; for very many of us have come, at the peril of our lives, to save your honor and liberty. We have prepared everything to give you a throne, sire; not only liberty, but power; a throne for your acceptance; for, in two months, you may choose between France and Navarre."

"De Mouy," replied Henry, looking downwards for an instant to conceal the joy that sparkled in his eyes; "De Mouy, I am safe; I am a Catholic; I am the husband of Marguerite; I am the brother of King Charles; I am son-in-law of my good mother Catherine; and when, De Mouy, I took all these relations upon me, I not only calculated the chances, but also the obligations."

"But, sire," replied De Mouy, "what am I to believe? They say that your marriage is incomplete; they say you are free in your own heart; they say that Catherine's hatred——"

"Lies, lies, lies all!" interrupted the Béarnais, hastily; "you have been impudently deceived, my friend. My dearest Marguerite is indeed my wife; Catherine is truly my mother; the King Charles IX. is really the lord and master of my life and of my heart."

De Mouy started, and a smile almost contemptuous passed over his lips.

"Then, sire," said he, endeavoring by his look to fathom a mind so full of concealment; "this is the answer I shall bear to my brothers in arms. I shall say that the King of Navarre extends his hand and gives his heart to those who cut our throats; I shall say that he has become the flatterer of the queen-mother, and the friend of Maurevel."

"My dear De Mouy," was Henry's response, "the king is just breaking up the council; and I must go and learn what are the important reasons which have postponed the hunt. Adieu! imitate me, my friend: renounce politics, swear allegiance to the king and take the mass." And Henry led, or rather pushed, the young man to the door of his antechamber, whilst De Mouy's amazement was fast giving way to rage.

Scarcely was the door closed, than, unable to resist his desire of visiting his vengeance on something for want of somebody, De Mouy squeezed his hat between his hands, threw it on the ground, and trampling it under foot, as a bull does the cloak of a matador:

"S'death!" he cried, "he is a cowardly prince, and I have a great mind to kill myself on this very spot, that my blood may forever stain him and his name."

"Hush! M. de Mouy," said a voice which come from behind a half-opened door; "hush! or some one else will hear you besides myself."

De Mouy turned round suddenly, and perceived the Duke d'Alençon enveloped in his mantle, and thrusting his pale face into the corridor to ascertain if he and De Mouy were really alone.

"The Duke d'Alençon!" cried De Mouy; "then I am lost!"

"On the contrary," said the prince, in a subdued tone, "you have perchance found that which you have been seeking; and, in proof of this, I would not have you kill yourself here, as you propose. Believe me, your blood may be better employed than in reddening the threshold of the King of Navarre."

And, at these words, the duke opened wide the door of the chamber which had been hitherto ajar.

"This chamber belongs to two of my gentlemen," said the duke; "and no one will come to seek you here. So we may converse at our ease. Come hither, then, sir."

"I am at your royal highness' service," said the amazed conspirator, and he entered the chamber, the duke closing the door after him quickly and securely.

De Mouy entered, furious, enraged, and desperate; but gradually the cold and steady gaze of the young Duke François had the effect on the young Huguenot captain that ice has upon intoxication.

"M. de Mouy," said François, "I thought I recognized you in spite of your disguise, as you presented arms to my brother Henry. What, De Mouy, are not you satisfied with the King of Navarre?"

"Monseigneur!"

"Come, come! speak frankly to me; and perhaps you may find I am your friend."

"You, Monseigneur!"

"Yes, I; but speak."

"I know not what to say to your highness; what I had to tell the King of Navarre touched on interests impossible to be understood by you; besides," added De Mouy, "it was about trifles after all."

"Trifles!" exclaimed the duke.

"Yes, monseigneur."

"Trifles! when for this you have exposed your life by returning to the Louvre, when you well know your head is worth its weight in gold? For it is well known that you, like the King of Navarre and the Prince de Condé, are one of the principal leaders of the Huguenots."

"If you think so, monseigneur, act towards me as the brother of Charles the king, and the son of Catherine, the queen-mother, should act."

"Why would you have me act so, when I tell you I am your friend? Tell me but the truth, and——"

"Monseigneur, I swear to you——"

"Do not swear, sir; the Reformed religion forbids oaths, and especially false oaths."

De Mouy frowned.

"I tell you I know all," continued the duke.

De Mouy was still silent.

"Do you doubt it ?" proceeded the prince, with earnestness. "Well, then, my dear De Mouy, I must convince you, and you will see if I speak sooth or not. Have you, or not, proposed to my brother-in-law, Henry, there, just now," and the duke extended his hand towards Henry's apartments ; "your aid, and that of your allies, to re-establish him in his kingdom of Navarre ?"

De Mouy looked at the duke in amazement.

"Propositions which he refused in alarm——"

De Mouy remained stupefied with surprise.

"Did you not, then, invoke your ancient friendship—the remembrance of your common religion ? Did you not, then, seek to lure on the King of Navarre by a very brilliant hope and prospect—so brilliant that he was dazzled at it—the hope of attaining even the crown of France ? Eh ! am I, or not, well informed ? Was it not this you came to propose to the Béarnais ?"

"Monseigneur," exclaimed De Mouy, "it is so precisely all that occurred, that I ask myself at this moment whether I ought not to say to your highness that you lie ! provoke you in this very chamber to a combat, and seek in the death of one of us the extinction of this terrible secret."

"Gently, my brave De Mouy, gently," replied D'Alençon without changing countenance, or making the slightest motion at this menace ; "this secret will be better kept between us two, if we both live, than if one of us were to die. Listen to me, and do not thus grip the handle of your sword ; for the third time I tell you, you are with a friend ; reply, then as to a friend. Tell me, did not the King of Navarre refuse your offers ?"

"He did, my lord, and I confess it because the avowal can compromise no one but myself."

"And are you still of the same opinion you were when you quitted my brother Henry's chamber, and said he was a cowardly prince, and unworthy any longer to remain your leader ?"

"I am, monseigneur, and more so than ever."

"Well, then, M. de Mouy, am I, the third son of Henry II.—I, a son of France—am I good enough to command your soldiers? Let us see. Do you think me so loyal that you rely on my word?"

"You, monseigneur! you the chief of the Huguenots?"

"Why not? This is the epoch of conversions, as you know, and if Henry has become a Catholic, why may not I turn Protestant?"

"Unquestionably, monseigneur; but perhaps you will explain to me——"

"Nothing more simple; I will unfold to you, in two words, everybody's politics. My brother Charles kills the Huguenots, that he may reign more absolutely. My brother D'Anjou lets him kill them, that he may succeed my brother Charles, and as you know, my brother Charles is often ill. But I—it is very different with me, who will never reign over France; at least, I have two elder brothers before me; with me, whom the hatred of my mother and brothers, more even than the law of nature, alienates from the throne—with me, who see before me no family affection, no glory, no kingdom—with me, who yet have a heart as noble as my brothers; and therefore I, De Mouy, would fain cut myself out a throne with my sword in this France which they are staining with gore! And this is what I would do, De Mouy—listen: I would be King of Navarre, not by right of birth, but by election; and observe well, you can have no objection to make me so, for I am no usurper; my brother refuses your offers, and buried in torpor, declares openly that this kingdom of Navarre is but a fiction. With Henry of Béarn, you have nothing now in common; with me you may have a sword and a name. François d'Alençon, son of France, can protect all his companions or accomplices, as you may please to call them.—Well, then! what say you to this offer, M. de Mouy?"

"I say it perfectly bewilders me, monseigneur."

"De Mouy, De Mouy, we shall have many obstacles to overcome; do not, then, show yourself so scrupulous and difficult with the son of a king, and the brother of a king, who comes to you."

"Monseigneur, the thing should be done at once, if I were the only person to decide ; but we have a council, and how brilliant soever may be the offer, perhaps the leaders will not accede to it without a condition."

"This is another consideration, and the reply is that of an honest heart and a prudent mind. By the way in which I have acted, De Mouy, you must see that I am frank and honorable ; treat me, then, on your part, like a man you esteem, and not a prince whom you would flatter. De Mouy, have I any chance ?"

"On my word, monseigneur, and since your highness desires to have my opinion, you shall have every chance, since the King of Navarre refuses the offer I have just made him. But I repeat to you, monseigneur, it is indispensable that I have a consultation with our leaders."

"Of course, sir," was D'Alençon's reply ; "only when shall I have the answer ?"

De Mouy considered the prince with silent attention, and then coming to a resolution, said :

"Monseigneur, give me your hand ; it is necessary that the hand of a son of France should touch mine, to be sure I shall not be betrayed."

The duke not only extended his hand to De Mouy, but seized his, and clasped it in his own.

"Now, monseigneur, I am assured," said the young Huguenot ; "if we were betrayed, I should acquit you of all participation ; without which, monseigneur, however little you were concerned in such treachery, you would be dishonored."

"Why do you say that, De Mouy, before you have brought me even the reply of your chiefs ?"

"Because, monseigneur, when you desire to know when the answer shall be given, you ask me in that question, where our leaders are ; and if I replied, 'This evening,' you would know that the chiefs were concealed in Paris."

And as he said these words, with a gesture of distrust, De Mouy fixed his piercing eye on the face of the false and vacillating young prince.

"What, you have still your doubts, De Mouy ; but yet what right have I to your confidence at a first interview? You will know me better by and by. You say this evening, then, M. de Mouy?"

"Yes, monseigneur, for time presses. This evening. But where?"

"Here, in the Louvre; in this apartment, if that suits you."

"This apartment is occupied."

"By two of my gentlemen."

"Monseigneur, it seems to me imprudent to return to the Louvre."

"Wherefore?"

"Because others may recognize me as well as your highness. Yet, if you will accord me a safe conduct, I will return to the Louvre."

"De Mouy," replied the duke, "my safe conduct, seized on your person, would destroy me, and would not save you; I cannot. The least evidence of concert between us, before my mother or brothers, would cost me my life. Make, therefore, another trial of your own courage. I will guarantee your safety, and try on my word what you tried without my brother's word. Come to the Louvre this evening,"

"But how?"

"I think I see the means before me—here."

And the duke saw on the bed La Mole's dress spread out—a magnificent cherry-colored cloak, embroidered with gold, a hat with a white plume, surrounded by a string of pearls, with gold and silver between them, and a gray satin doublet worked with gold.

"Do you see this cloak, feather, and doublet?" said the duke. "They belong to M. de la Mole, one of my gentlemen, and a fop of the first water. This dress creates quite a sensation at court, and M. de la Mole is recognized a hundred yards off when he wears it. I will give you his tailor's address, and, by paying him double the value, he will bring you a similar suit this evening. Remember the name—M. de la Mole."

The duke had scarcely done speaking, when a step was heard of some one approaching, and a key was turned in the lock of the door.

"Who's there?" inquired the duke, hastening towards the door, which he secured with a bolt.

"*Pardieu!*" replied a voice from without, "that is a very odd question; who are you? It is rather pleasant, i' faith, to come to one's own room, and be asked, Who's there?"

"Oh! 'tis you, M. de la Mole?"

"Of course it is. But who are you?"

D'Alençon turned round suddenly, and said to De Mouy, "Do you know M. de la Mole?"

"No, monseigneur."

"Does he know you?"

"I should say, no."

"Then all will go well. Just appear to be looking out of window."

De Mouy obeyed, and the duke opening the door, La Mole entered hastily, but when he saw the duke he retreated, surprised, and saying:

"Monseigneur the duke! Your pardon—your pardon, monseigneur!"

"It needs not, sir; I wished to see a person, and made use of your apartment."

"Pray do, monseigneur. But allow me to take my cloak and hat, for I lost both last night on the Quai de la Grève."

"Really! You must have had an encounter with some determined robbers, then?"

The duke handed the young gentleman the desired articles, and La Mole retired to dress himself in the antechamber. On his return in a few moments:

"Has your highness heard or seen anything of the Comte de Coconnas?" he asked.

"No, M. le Comte; and yet he should have been on duty this morning."

"Then they have murdered him!" said La Mole to himself, as he made his obeisance and rushed out again.

The duke listened to his retreating footsteps, and then opening the door, said to De Mouy:

"Look at him, and try to imitate his easy and peculiar gesture."

"I will do my best," replied De Mouy; "unfortunately, I am not a fine gentleman, but only a soldier."

"I shall expect you before midnight, here, or in some unoccupied apartment. To-night before midnight."

"To-night before midnight!"

"Ah! apropos—De Mouy, swing your right arm as you walk: it is a peculiarity of M. de la Mole."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE RUE TIZON AND THE RUE CLOCHE-PERCÉE.

La Mole ran out of the Louvre, and went in search of poor Coconnas.

First he went to the Rue de l'Arbre-Sec, to Maître la Hurière; but he found nothing there but breakfast, to which, despite his inquietude, he did ample justice.

His appetite appeased, La Mole went along the Seine. Arrived at the Quai de la Grève, he recognized the spot where he had been stopped three or four hours before, and found on the field of battle a fragment of his hat-plume. La Mole had ten feathers, each handsomer than the other; he stopped, nevertheless, to pick up this, or rather the only fragment that remained of it, and was looking at it with a piteous air, when an authoritative voice bade him stand aside. La Mole looked up, and perceived a litter, preceded by two pages, and followed by a squire. La Mole thought he recognized the litter, and stood on one side.

He was not mistaken.

"M. de la Mole?" said a sweet voice from the litter, whilst a hand, white and soft as satin, put aside the curtains.

"Yes, 'tis I myself, madame," replied La Mole, bowing.

"M. de la Mole, with a plume in his hand?" said the lady. "Are you in love, then, and seek here lost traces of your mistress?"

"Yes, madame," returned La Mole, "I am in love, and to desperation. As for these relics, they are my own, though not those I seek. But permit me to inquire after your majesty's health."

"Excellent—never better; probably from the circumstance of my having passed the night in a convent."

"Ah, in a convent!" said La Mole, looking at Marguerite with a singular expression.

"Yes; what is there so astonishing in that?"

"May I venture to inquire, in what convent?"

"Certainly; I make no mystery of it: at the convent of the Annunciation. But what are you doing here, with so wild an air?"

"Madame, I am looking for a friend; and in his place I find this plume."

"Which belongs to him? You really alarm me for him; the spot has an ill name."

"Your majesty may be reassured; the plume is mine: I lost it here this morning, at about half-past five, in escaping from four bandits who attacked me."

Marguerite suppressed an exclamation of terror.

"Oh, tell me all about it!"

"A simple matter, madame. It was as I said, about half past five——"

"And at half-past five you were already out?"

"Nay, madame, I had not yet gone home."

"Ah!" said Marguerite, with a smile that to every one else would have seemed malicious, but which La Mole thought adorable; "returning home so late! You are rightly served."

"I do not complain, your majesty," said La Mole; "and had I been killed, I should have thought myself far happier than I merit. But as I was returning, four scoundrels rushed on me, armed with long knives, and I was fain to fly, for I had left my sword in the house where I had passed the night."

"Oh, I understand," said Marguerite, with an exquisite air of simplicity; "you are going to fetch your sword."

La Mole looked at Marguerite, doubtingly:

"Madame," said he, "I should be glad to return thither, for my sword is an excellent blade; but I do not know where the house is."

"What!" said Marguerite, "you do not know where the house is?"

"No; Satan exterminate me, if I have the least idea."

"How very strange! Quite a romance, upon my word."

"Quite so, madame."

"Relate it to me."

"It is somewhat long."

"No matter, I have plenty of time."

"And very incredible."

"Go on, I am excessively credulous."

"Your majesty commands me?"

"Yes, if necessary."

"I obey: last night we supped at Maître la Hurière's."

"First and foremost," asked Marguerite, with a beautiful simplicity, "who is Maître la Hurière?"

"Maître la Hurière, madame," answered La Mole, with another look of doubt at the Queen, "is the landlord of the *Belle Etoile*, in the Rue de l'Arbre-Sec."

"Ah, I understand; well, you were supping at La Hurière's with your friend Coconnas, no doubt?"

"Yes, madame, with my friend Coconnas; when a man entered, and gave each of us a billet."

"Alike?"

"Exactly."

"And which contained——"

"But one line:

"'*You are waited for in the Rue Saint Antoine, opposite the Rue de Jouy.*'"

"And no signature?"

"None, but three words, three delicious words that promised a triple happiness."

"And what were these three words?"

"EROS, CUPIDO, AMOR."

"Three soft, pretty names, by my faith; and did they fulfil what they promised?"

"Oh, yes, madame," cried La Mole, with enthusiasm, "a hundred-fold!"

"Continue. I am anxious to know what awaited you at the Rue Saint Antoine."

"Two duennas, who stipulated that our eyes should be bandaged. Your majesty may imagine we made no great difficulty. My guide led me to the right, my friend's led him to the left."

"And then?" asked Marguerite.

"I do not know where they took my friend; perhaps to the infernal regions," said La Mole; "but I was taken to Paradise."

"And whence your too great inquisitiveness no doubt got you expelled."

"Exactly so: your majesty has the gift of divination. I waited until day should come to show me where I was, when the duenna entered, blindfolded me again, and led me away, out of the house, and some hundred paces on, and then made me promise not to take off the bandage till I had counted fifty. I counted fifty, and then, on taking off the handkerchief found myself in the Rue St. Antoine, opposite the Rue de Jouy. On returning here, just now, I perceived a fragment, of my plume, which I shall preserve as a precious relic of this glorious night. But amidst my happiness, one thing disquiets me: what can have become of my friend?"

"He is not at the Louvre, then?"

"Alas, no; and I have sought him at the *Belle Etoile*, at the tennis court, and everywhere, but there is no Annibal to be found."

As he said this, and accompanied his lamentation by throwing up his arms La Mole disclosed his doublet, which was torn and cut in several places.

"Why, you have been completely riddled!" said Marguerite.

"Riddled—that is the exact word," said La Mole, not sorry to make the most of the danger he had incurred.

"Why did you not change your doublet at the Louvre, when you got back?"

"Why," said La Mole, "because there was some one in my chamber."

"How, some one in your chamber?" said Marguerite, whose eyes expressed the greatest astonishment. "Who?"

"His highness——"

"Hush!" said Marguerite.

The young man obeyed.

"Qui ad lecticam meam stant?"—("Who are with the litter?")

"Duo pueri et unus eques."—("Two pages and a groom?")

"Optimè barbari," said she. "Dic, Moles, quem inveneris in cubiculo tuo?"—("Good; they won't understand us. Tell me, La Mole, whom did you find in your chamber?")

"Franciscum ducem."—("Duke Francis.")

"Agentem."—("What was he doing?")

"Nescio quid."—("I don't know.")

"Quo cum?"—("Who was with him?")

"Cum ignoto."—("A man I don't know.")

"Singular," said Marguerite. "So you have not found Coconnas?"

"No, madame, and I am dying with anxiety."

"Well," said Marguerite, "I will not further delay your search; but I have an idea he will be found before long. But nevertheless, go and look for him."

And the queen placed her finger on her lip. Now, as Marguerite had not communicated any secret to La Mole, he comprehended that this charming sign must have another meaning.

The cortège pursued its way; and La Mole proceeded along the quay, till he came to the Rue du Long-Pont, which took him into the Rue Saint Antoine.

He stopped opposite the Rue de Jouy.

It was there, the previous evening, that the duennas had blindfolded Coconnas and himself; he well remembered he had turned to the right and counted twenty paces; he did so again, and found himself opposite a house, or rather a wall, with a house in it: in the middle of the wall was a door studded with large nails.

The house was in the Rue Cloche-Percée, a little narrow street that commences in the Rue St. Antoine, and ends in the Rue du Roi-de-Sicile.

"*Sangbleu!*" said La Mole. "This is it: as I left the house, I touched the nails, and as I descended the second step, that man who was killed in the Rue du Roi-de-Sicile, passed, crying for help."

La Mole knocked at the door. A porter with a vast mustache opened it.

"Was est dass?" said he.—("What's that?")

"Ah," said La Mole to himself, "we are German, it seems. My friend," continued he, "I want my sword, which I left here last night."

"Ich verstehe nicht," said the porter.—("I don't understand you.")

"My sword——"

"Ich verstehe nicht."

"——That I left——"

"Ich verstehe nicht."

"——In this house, where I passed the night.

"Gehe zum Teufel."—("Go to the devil!")

And he shut the door in his face.

"*Mordieu!*" said La Mole, "had I my sword, I would pass it through your body."

La Mole then struck into the Rue du Roi-de-Sicile, turned to the right, counted fifty paces, turned to the right again, and found himself in the Rue Tizon, a little street parallel with the Rue Cloche-Percée, and exactly like it. Scarcely had he taken thirty steps when he found the little door studded with nails, the narrow loopholes, the two steps and the wall.

La Mole then reflected that he might have mistaken his right for his left, and he knocked at this door, but spite of his reiterated attempts, no one came. He walked round the same way several times, and then arrived at the natural conclusion, that the house had two entrances, one in the Rue Tizon, the other, Rue Cloche-Percée. But this logical reasoning did not give him back his sword, or his friend.

He had for an instant an idea of purchasing another rapier, and pinking the porter ; but he was checked by the reflection, that if he belonged to Marguerite, she, doubtless, had her reasons for selecting him, and would be vexed were she deprived of him.

Now La Mole would not for the world have done anything to vex Marguerite.

To avoid the temptation, he returned to the Louvre.

This time his apartment was empty ; and being in no small haste to change his pourpoint, which was somewhat dilapidated, he hastened to the bed to take down his fine gray satin doublet, when, to his intense amazement, he saw hanging beside it the identical sword he had left in the Rue Cloche-Percée. He took it and examined it : it was indeed the same.

"Ah, ah !" said he, "there is some magic in this." Then, with a sigh : "Ah, if Coconnas would come back like this sword !"

Two or three hours afterwards, the door in the Rue Tizon opened. It was five o'clock, and consequently dark.

A female enveloped in a long furred mantle, accompanied by a servant, came out of the door, glided rapidly into the Rue du Roi-de-Sicile, knocked at a little door of the Hôtel D'Argenson, entered the hotel, left it again by the great gate that opens into the Vieille Rue du Temple, reached a private door of the Hôtel de Guise, opened it with a pass-key, and disappeared.

Half an hour afterwards, a young man, his eyes bandaged, came out of the same door of the same house, led by an old woman, who took him to the corner of the Rue Geoffroy-Lasnier and De la Mortellerie. There she bade him count fifty paces, and then take off the handkerchief.

The young man complied scrupulously with these directions, and at the prescribed number took off the bandage.

"*Mordi*"! cried he, "I'll be hanged if I know where I am! Six o'clock! Why, where can La Mole be? I'll run to the Louvre; I shall perhaps hear of him there."

So saying, Coconnas started off, and arrived at the Louvre in less time than a horse would have performed the distance.

He questioned the Swiss and the sentinel. The Swiss thought he had seen M. de la Mole go out, but he had not seen him return. The sentinel had only been on guard an hour and a half, and had seen nothing.

Coconnas ascended the stairs, entered La Mole's room, and found nothing but his torn doublet, which redoubled his anxiety.

He then betook himself to La Hurière's. La Hurière had seen M. la Mole—M. de la Mole had breakfasted there.

Reassured by these tidings, Coconnas ordered supper, which occupied him until eight o'clock, when, recruited by a good meal and two bottles of wine, he again started in search of his friend.

For an hour Coconnas traversed the streets near the Quai de la Rève, the Rue St. Antoine, and the Rues Tizon and Cloche-Percée.

At last he returned to the Louvre, determined to watch under the gate there until La Mole's return.

He was not a hundred paces from the Louvre, and was assisting a female to rise, whose husband he had upset just before, when, by the light of a large lamp, he perceived the cherry-velvet mantle and white plume of his friend, which, like a ghost, disappeared beneath the portal of the Louvre.

The cherry-colored mantle was too well known to be for an instant mistaken.

"*Mordi!*" cried Coconnas; "it is he at last! Eh, La Mole! Why does he not answer? Fortunately my legs are as good as my voice."

He dashed after Cherry Mantle, but only in time to see him, as he entered the court, disappear in the vestibule.

"La Mole!" cried Coconnas; "stop! stop! why are you in such haste?"

Cherry Mantle mounted the second story as if he had wings.

"Ah, you are angry with me. Well, I can go no further."

Coconnas ceased the pursuit, but followed with his eyes the fugitive, who now arrived at the apartments of the Queen of Navarre: suddenly, a female appeared, and took Cherry Mantle by the hand.

"Oh," said Coconnas, "that's Queen Marguerite; now I know why he would not wait."

After a few whispered words, Cherry Mantle followed the queen into her apartments.

"Good!" said Coconnas. "There are times when your best friend is in the way: this is one, and I'll not interrupt the old fellow."

So Coconnas sat down on a bench covered with velvet.

"I'll stop here for him—or stay, he's with the queen, and I may stop long enough. It's confounded cold here, and I may just as well wait for him in his room; he must come there at last."

At this moment he heard a quick step on the stairs above, and a voice singing a little air so usual in La Mole's mouth that Coconnas looked up. It was La Mole himself, who perceiving the Piedmontese, ran down the stairs four at a time, and threw himself into his arms.

"*Mordi!* here you are!" said Coconnas. "Which way did you come out?"

"Why, by the Rue Cloche-Percée."

"No. I don't mean there."

"Whence then?"

"From the queen."

"From the queen!"

"Aye, from the queen."

"I have not been with her."

"Come! come!"

"My dear Annibal," said La Mole, "I've this instant left my room, where I've been awaiting for you these two hours."

"You've just left your room?"

"Yes."

"It was not you I ran after from the Place du Louvre?"

"When?"

"Just now."

"No."

"It wasn't you that disappeared under the gateway ten minutes ago?"

"No."

"It wasn't you that dashed up the stars as if the devil was after you?"

"No."

"*Mordi!*" replied Coconnas. "The wine of *la Belle Etoile* has not turned my head to that extent. I tell you, I saw your mantle and white plume enter the Louvre; that I followed the one and the other to the bottom of this staircase, and then saw the said mantle and plume led by a lady into that room, which I believe is Madame Marguerite's."

"*Mordieu!*" exclaimed La Mole, turning very pale. "Can there be treachery already!"

"Ah, swear as much as you like," returned Coconnas, "but don't tell me I was mistaken."

La Mole hesitated an instant, and then, carried away by his jealousy, rushed to the queen's door, and knocked furiously.

"You'll get us both arrested," said Coconnas, "*Mordi!* do you think there are ghosts at the Louvre, La Mole?"

"I do not know," said the young man; "but I've always wanted to see one, and would fain find myself face to face with this ghost, if ghost he be."

"Very good," said Coconnas; "but don't knock so loud, or you'll alarm the lady."

Enraged as La Mole was, he yet saw the justice of this observation; and though he continued to knock knocked less violently.

CHAPTER XXV.

CHERRY MANTLE.

COCONNAS was not deceived. The lady who had stopped the cavalier in the cherry mantle, was indeed the Queen of Navarre; the cavalier in the cherry mantle was, as our readers have doubtlessly guessed, no other than De Mouy.

On recognizing the Queen of Navarre, the young man saw there was some mistake, but he feared to say anything, lest a cry from the queen should betray him. He therefore suffered himself to be led into the apartment, resolved, once there, to say to his fair guide, "Silence for silence, madame."

Marguerite had gently pressed the arm of him whom, in the darkness, she mistook for La Mole, and whispered in his ear, in Latin:

"I am alone; come in, dearest."

De Mouy entered in silence; but scarcely was he in the antechamber, and the door closed, than Marguerite perceived that it was not La Mole, and she then uttered that very cry which the prudent Huguenot had dreaded.

"M. de Mouy!" cried she.

"Myself, madame," returned the young man; "and I entreat your majesty to suffer me to proceed, without informing any one of my presence at the Louvre."

"Oh, M. de Mouy," said the queen, "I was mistaken, then."

"Yes, so I comprehend," returned De Mouy; "your majesty mistook me for the King of Navarre. My dress is the same as his, and my height and figure, I have been told, are not unlike his."

Marguerite looked fixedly at him.

"Do you know Latin?" asked she.

"I did once, but I have forgotten it," replied the young man.

Marguerite smiled.

"You may rely upon my discretion, M. de Mouy; and as I think I know the person you seek, I will, if you so please, conduct you to him."

"Madame," replied De Mouy, "I see that you are mistaken, and that you are completely ignorant who the person is that I wish to see."

"What!" cried Marguerite, "is it not the King of Navarre you seek?"

"Alas, madame, it is with regret I have to beseech you to conceal my presence in the Louvre from the king your husband."

"M. de Mouy," said Marguerite, "I have always considered you one of the steadiest partisans of my husband, one of the most zealous Huguenot leaders. Am I, then, mistaken?"

"No, madame, for I was, up to this morning, all that you say."

"And why have you changed?"

"Madame," returned De Mouy, "I entreat you to excuse my replying, and to receive my adieu."

And De Mouy firmly, but respectfully, proceeded towards the door.

Marguerite stopped him.

"Yet, sir," said she, "I would fain request an explanation."

"Madame," returned De Mouy, "my duty bids me be silent; I need hardly say, that duty is an imperious one which prevents my obeying your majesty."

"Yet, sir——"

"Your majesty can ruin me, but you cannot require me to betray my new friends."

"Have your old friends no claims on you?"

"Those who have remained faithful, yes; those who not only have abandoned us, but themselves also, no."

Marguerite, greatly uneasy, was about to pursue her interrogatories, when Gillonne rushed in.

"The King of Navarre, madame!"

"Which way is he coming?"

"By the secret passage."

"Then let this gentleman out by the other door."

"Impossible, madame, some one is knocking there."

"Who is it ?"

"I do not know."

"Go and see."

"Madame," said De Mouy, "permit me to observe, that I am lost if the King of Navarre sees me in the Louvre at this hour and in this costume."

Marguerite seized his hand, and leading him to the famous cabinet :

"Enter there," said she ; "you are as safe as in your own house, for you are under my protection."

De Mouy sprang in, and hardly had he done so, when Henry appeared.

He entered with that cautious observation that made him, even when in the least danger, remark the most trifling circumstances. He instantly perceived the cloud on Marguerite's brow.

"You were musing, madame," said he.

"Yes, sire, I was."

"You are right, madame, thoughtfulness becomes you. I, too, was musing, and come to communicate my thoughts to you."

Marguerite inclined her head in token of welcome, and pointing to a seat, placed herself in an ebony chair beautifully carved.

There was an instant's pause : Henry first broke the silence.

"I remembered, madame," said he, "that my dreams as to the future had this in common with yours, that, though separated as husband and wife, we yet wished to unite our fortunes."

"It is true, sire."

"I also conjecture that in all my plans for our common elevation, I should find in you not only a faithful but an active ally."

"Yes, sire, and I only ask to have an early opportunity of proving it to you."

"I am delighted to find you so well disposed; and I believe you have not for an instant doubted that I have lost sight of those plans I resolved upon the day that, thanks to your courage, my life was saved."

"Sire, I see that your indifference is merely a mask, and I have confidence not only in the predictions of astrologers, but also in your genius."

"What should you say, then, were some one to come in in and thwart our plans, and threaten to destroy our hopes?"

"I would reply, that I am ready to strive with you, openly or in secret, against him, be who he may."

"Madame," returned Henry, "you have the right of entering the Duke d'Alençon's apartments at all times. Might I request of you to go and see if he be not in conference with some one."

"With whom?" asked Marguerite.

"With De Mouy."

"Why?" replied Marguerite.

"Because if it be so, adieu all our plans."

"Speak lower, sire," said Marguerite, pointing to the cabinet.

"Some one there again," said Henry. "By my faith, that cabinet is so often occupied, that it renders your apartments quite uninhabitable."

Marguerite smiled.

"At all events, I hope it is M. de la Mole, still?" said Henry.

"No, sire; it is M. de Mouy."

"De Mouy!" cried Henry, joyfully. "He is not, then, with the Duke d'Alençon. Oh, let me speak to him."

Marguerite ran to the cabinet, and without further ceremony presented De Mouy to the king.

"Ah, madame," said the young Huguenot, reproachfully, "you have not kept your promise. Suppose I were to revenge myself by saying——"

"You will not avenge yourself, my dear Mouy," said Henry, pressing his hand; "at least, not before you have heard me. "Madame," continued he, "have the kindness to see that no one overhears us."

Scarcely were these words uttered, when Gillonne entered all aghast, and said something to Marguerite that made her leave the room instantly. Meanwhile, not troubling himself as to the cause of her abrupt departure, Henry lifted the tapestry, sounded the walls, and looked into every recess. As for De Mouy, somewhat alarmed by these precautions, he loosened his sword in the scabbard.

Marguerite, on leaving her bedchamber, found herself in the presence of La Mole, who, in spite of Gillonne, was forcing his way in. Behind him stood Coconnas, ready to advance or retreat with him, as the case might be.

"Ah, is it you, M. de la Mole!" said the queen. "What is the matter with you? and what makes you look so pale?"

"Madame," said Gillonne, "M. de la Mole knocked so loud that, in spite of your majesty's orders, I was forced to admit him."

"Ha!" said the queen, angrily. "Is this true, M. de la Mole?"

"Madame, I wished to inform your majesty that a stranger, a robber perhaps, had entered your apartments, wearing my mantle and hat."

"You are mad, sir," returned Marguerite; "for I see your mantle on your shoulders; and moreover, by my faith, I see your hat on your head, though you are speaking to a queen."

"Forgive me, madame!" cried La Mole, hastily uncovering. "Heaven knows it is not want of respect——"

"No, but want of faith," said the queen.

"Oh, madame," said La Mole, "when a man enters apartments in my dress, perchance under my name——"

"*A* man!" said Marguerite, pressing her lover's hand. "Very fine, M. de la Mole; look through that opening, and you will see *two* men."

And she gently raised the velvet curtains, and showed to De la Mole and Coconnas, who, moved with curiosity, came forward, Henry speaking to the cavalier in the cherry-colored mantle, whom both at once recognized as De Mouy.

"Now that you are satisfied," said Marguerite, "place yourself at that door, and let no one enter: if any one even approaches, let me know."

La Mole, docile as an infant, obeyed, and both he and Coconnas found themselves outside the door, before they had well recovered from their amazement.

"De Mouy!" cried Coconnas.

"Henry!" muttered La Mole.

"De Mouy, with your cloak and hat."

"Zounds!" said La Mole, "this is some plot."

"Ah, here we are in politics again!" grumbled Coconnas. "Fortunately, I do not see Madame de Nevers mixed up in the matter."

Marguerite returned to her bedroom; she had been absent scarcely a minute, but she had made good use of her time. Gillonne guarding the secret passage, and the two gentlemen outside the principal entrance, afforded full security.

"Madame," said Henry, "do you think it possible any one can overhear us?"

"Sire," returned Marguerite, "the walls are all double-panelled, and lined between with mattresses."

"Ay, ay, that will do," said Henry, smiling.

Then turning to De Mouy: "Now, then," said he, in a low tone, as, notwithstanding Marguerite's assurances, his fears were not dissipated, "what are you come here for?"

"Here!" repeated De Mouy.

"Yes, here—to this chamber?"

"He did not come for anything," said Marguerite; "it was I who brought him here."

"You knew then——?"

"I guessed."

"You see, De Mouy, people can guess."

"M. de Mouy," continued Marguerite, "was with Duke François this morning in the chamber of one of his gentlemen."

"You see, de Mouy," repeated Henry, "we know all."

"It is true," said De Mouy.

"I was sure," replied the king, "that D'Alençon had got hold of you."

"It is your fault, sire. Why did you refuse so obstinately what I offered."

"Ah, you refused!" said Marguerite. "My presentiments, then, were real."

"Madame," said Henry, "and you, my worthy De Mouy, you make me smile. What! a man comes to me, and talks to me of thrones and revolutions, and overthrowing states—to me, Henry, a prince tolerated only because I humble myself; a Huguenot, spared only because I pretend to be a Catholic; and thinks I am going to accept his propositions, made in a chamber without double panels, and not lined with mattresses. You are children, or mad!"

"But, sire, your majesty might have given me some sign, to raise our hopes."

"What did my brother-in-law say to you, De Mouy?" asked Henry.

"Oh, sire, that is not my secret."

"Oh, *mon Dieu!*" said Henry, impatient at having to deal with a man who did not understand him. "I do not ask you what proposals he made you. I only asked you if he had listened, and if he had overheard?"

"He had listened, sire, and he had overheard."

"He listened and overheard!—you admit that yourself. Poor conspirator that you are! Had I spoken a word, you had been undone; for, if I did not absolutely know he was there, I suspected as much; and if not he, some one else—D'Anjou, the king, or the queen-mother. The walls of the Louvre have good ears; and, knowing that, do you think I should speak? I wonder you offer a crown to the King of Navarre, when you give him credit for so little good sense."

"But, sire," said De Mouy, "had you made me a sign, I should not have lost all hope."

"Eh, *ventre-saint-gris!*" cried Henry. "If he listened, could he not see also? At this very instant I dread lest we may be overheard, when I say to you, De Mouy, repeat to me your proposals."

"Sire," said De Mouy, mournfully, "I am now engaged with M. d'Alençon."

Marguerite beat her fair hands together violently.

"It is, then, too late," said she.

"On the contrary," said Henry, "the hand of Providence is visible in this; for the duke will save us all; he will be a buckler protecting us; whereas the name of the King of Navarre would involve you all, by degrees, in destruction. Get fast hold of him; secure proofs; but, silly politician that you are, you have doubtless engaged yourself already, without using any precautions."

"Sire," cried De Mouy, "despair made me join his party, and fear also, for he held our secret."

"Then hold his in your turn. What does he want?—the kingdom of Navarre? Promise it him. To quit the court? Supply him with the means. When the time comes for us to fly, he and I will fly together: when it is time to reign, I will reign alone."

"Distrust the duke," said Marguerite; "he is alike incapable of hatred and friendship; ever ready to treat his enemies as friends, and his friends as enemies."

"He awaits you?" said Henry, without heeding his wife's remark.

"Yes, sire."

"At what hour?"

"Until midnight."

"It is not yet eleven," said Henry; "you are not too late, De Mouy."

"We have your word, sir," said Marguerite.

"Come, come," said Henry, with that air of confidence he so well knew how to show to certain persons and on certain occasions; "with M. de Mouy this is needless."

"You do me justice, sire," returned the young man. "But I must have your word that I may tell our leaders that I have received it. You are not, then, a Catholic?"

Henry shrugged his shoulders.

"You do not renounce the kingdom of Navarre?"

"I do not renounce any kingdom, only I would select that which suits you and me the best."

"And, in the meantime, were your majesty to be arrested, and they should dare so to violate the regal dignity as to torture you, will you swear to reveal nothing?"

'De Mouy, I swear it."

"One word, sire. How shall I see you?"

"From to-morrow you will have a key of my chamber, and you can come in when you will. The duke must explain your presence at the Louvre. I will now guide you up the private staircase; meantime, the queen will bring in here the other cherry mantle, who was just now in the antechamber. It must not be supposed you are double; eh, De Mouy? eh, madame?"

Henry laughed as he said this, and looked at Marguerite.

"Yes," replied she, without any emotion; "for you know this M. de la Mole is one of the gentlemen of the Duke D'Alençon."

"Try and get him to our side, then," said Henry, with entire gravity: "spare neither gold nor promises; I place all my treasures at his disposal."

"Well, then," said Marguerite, with one of those smiles that belong only to Boccaccio's heroines, "since such is your desire, I will do my best to promote it."

"Very good, madame; and now to the duke, De Mouy, and hook him."

CHAPTER XXVI.

MARGUERITE.

During this conversation, La Mole and Coconnas remained on guard; the former marvelously vexed, and Coconnas somewhat uneasy, for La Mole had had time for reflection, and Coconnas had most liberally assisted him in it.

"What do you think of all this?" asked La Mole.

"I think," replied the Piedmontese, "that it is some intrigue of the court."

"And are you disposed to play a part in it?"

"My dear fellow!" returned Coconnas, "listen to what I shall say, and give heed thereunto. In all these royal maneuverings we are, and should be, but shadows: where the King of Navarre would only lose the end of his feather, or the Duke d'Alençon the skirt of his cloak, you and I should lose our lives. Go crazy in love, if you please, but do not meddle in politics."

"But I love the queen, Annibal; I love her with all my soul; 'tis folly, I admit; but you, Coconnas, who are prudent, must not suffer by my folly. Seek our master, and do not compromise yourself."

Coconnas reflected an instant, then, shaking his head:

"My dear fellow!" said he, "what you say is very just; you are in love, and you act like a lover; I am ambitious, and think life worth more than the smile of a woman. When I risk my life, I will make my own terms, and do you, on your part, do the same."

So saying, Coconnas pressed La Mole's hand, and left him.

About ten minutes after, the door opened cautiously, and Marguerite appeared. Without speaking a word, she led La Mole into her apartment, closing the doors with a care that showed the importance of the conversation she was about to open.

Arrived in her chamber, she sat down in her ebony chair, and taking La Mole's hands in hers:

"Now that we are alone, my friend," said she, "we will talk seriously."

"Seriously, madame?" said La Mole.

"Or confidentially, if you like the word better. There may be serious things in confidential conversations, especially in those of a queen."

"Let us speak seriously, then; but on condition that your majesty be not offended with what I shall say."

"I shall only be offended at one thing, La Mole, and that is, if you call me 'madame' or 'your majesty;' for you, I am only Marguerite."

"Yes, Marguerite! yes, Marguerite!" cried the young man, gazing passionately at the queen.

"That is well," said Marguerite; "and so you are jealous, my fair sir?"

"Oh, madly!"

"Ah! and of whom?"

"Of every one."

"But of whom in particular?"

"First, of the king."

"I thought, after what you had seen and heard, you were easy on that score."

"Of this M. de Mouy, whom I saw this morning for the first time, and whom I find this evening on such intimate terms with you."

"And what makes you jealous of De Mouy?"

"I recognized him by his air, his figure; by a natural feeling of hate: it is he who was with M. d'Alençon this morning."

"Well, what has he to do with me?"

"That I know not. But in default of any other return, a love like mine is entitled to frankness on your part. See, madame, at your feet I implore you! If what you have felt for me is but a temporary inclination, I give you back your faith and your promises; I will resign my post to M. d'Alençon, and go and seek death at the siege of Rochelle, if love does not kill me before I arrive there!"

Marguerite listened with a smile to these tender reproaches, then, leaning her head on his burning hand:

"You love me?" she said.

"Oh, yes, madame, more than life! But you do not love me."

"Silly fellow!" murmured she; "and so the sole interest of life with you is your love?"

"It is, indeed, madame."

"You love me, then, and would fain remain with me?"

"My only prayer is, that I may never part from you."

"Were I to tell you I love you, should you be wholly devoted to me?"

"Am I not so already?"

"Yes; but you still doubt."

"Oh, I am an ingrate, or rather, I am mad; but tell me, why was M. de Mouy this morning with the Duke d'Alençon? why here to-night? what meant the white plume, the cherry-colored mantle, the imitating my walk and manner?"

"Can you not guess! The Duke d'Alençon would kill you with his own hand, did he know you were here at my feet; and that, instead of ordering you to quit my presence, I said to you then as I now say, stay where you are, for I love you."

"All gratitude to you for the word," murmured La Mole.

"Listen," continued the queen; "it was not for me that M. de Mouy came here in your hat and cloak; it was for M. d'Alençon; but I mistook him for you; I spoke to him, thinking it was you; I led him hither, thinking it was you. He possesses our secret, La Mole, and must be managed cautiously."

"I had rather kill him," said La Mole; "'tis the shortest and safest way."

"And I," said the queen, "had rather he should live, and that you should know all. Now answer me truly, La Mole; do you love me enough to rejoice if I were to become really queen?"

"Alas, madame," said La Mole, "I love you enough to desire whatever you desire, though it involved myself in utter misery!"

"Will you, then, aid me to realize this object?"

"Oh, I shall lose you!" cried La Mole, burying his face in his hands.

"No; only, instead of being the first of my servants, you will become the first of my subjects."

"Oh, speak not of interest, of ambition! Do not dishonor the sentiment I have for you!—my devotion, my ardent, my unmixed devotion!"

"Noble nature!" said the queen; "I will accept your devotion, and, be assured, will repay it."

And she held out her hands, which La Mole pressed in his own.

"Well!" said she.

"Well, yes," replied La Mole; "I now begin to understand the project spoken of by the Huguenots before the Bartholomew; the project, to aid in which, I, with so many others, came to Paris. De Mouy conspires with you; but what has the Duke d'Alençon to do with all this? Is he sufficiently your friend to aid you, without demanding anything in return?"

"The duke conspires for himself. Let him go on his own way; his life answers for ours."

"But how can I, who am in his service, betray him?"

"Betray him! how so? What has he intrusted to you? Has he not betrayed you, by giving de Mouy your mantle and hat, to enable him to come here? Were you not in my service before you were in his? Has he given you a greater proof of his friendship than I have of love?"

La Mole rose, pale and agitated.

"Coconnas was right," murmured he; "I am becoming entangled in the net of intrigue, and it will destroy me."

"Well," said Marguerite.

"This is my answer," returned La Mole. "Even at the extremity of France, where the reputation of your beauty reached me, and gave me my first desire to visit Paris, that I might see you, I have heard it said, that you have often loved, and that your love has always been fatal to its objects; death, doubtless jealous of their happiness, removed them from you. Do not interrupt me, Marguerite. It is added, that you have ever with you the embalmed hearts of these departed ones, and that, at times, you bestow on these sad remains a piteous sigh, perchance a tear. You sigh, my queen, your eyes are lowered to the ground; it is true, then? Well; let me be favored as these were, only with this difference; swear that if (as a somber presentiment assures me I shall) I perish beneath the executioner's stroke in your service, you will preserve that head which I shall forfeit, and will sometimes look upon it. Swear this, and the prospect of such a reward shall make me be, or do, whatever you command me."

"Oh, gloomy foreboding!" said the queen.

"Swear!"

"Swear?"

"Yes, on this cross-surmounted coffer."

"I swear," said Marguerite, "that if your somber presentiment be realized, you shall be near me, living or dead, so long as I myself shall live; if I cannot save you, you shall have the poor consolation you ask, and which you will have so well merited."

"One word more, Marguerite—I can now die happily; but I may live; we may triumph, and not fall. The King of Navarre may become king, you will then be queen; he will take you hence; the vow of separation between you may one day be broken, and lead to my separation from you. Oh! dearest Marguerite, reassure me also on this point."

"Fear not," cried Marguerite, placing her hand on the cross; "if I go, you shall accompany me; if the king refuses to take you, I myself will not depart."

"But you will not dare resist him."

"Dear Hyacinthe," said Marguerite, "you do not know the king; Henry thinks but of one thing, that of becoming a king, and to that he would sacrifice all; and now, farewell!"

From this evening La Mole was no longer a common favorite, and he could proudly hold up that head, for which, living or dead, so high a destiny was reserved. Yet sometimes his eyes were fixed on the ground, his cheek grew pale, and deep meditation drew furrows on the brow of the young man, once so gay, now so happy.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE HAND OF PROVIDENCE.

As Henry left Madame de Sauve, he said to her:

"Charlotte, confine yourself to your bed; pretend to be exceedingly ill, and do not receive any person during the day under any pretext whatsoever."

Charlotte, knowing that Henry had secrets which he revealed to no one, complied with all his directions, certain that his conduct was based on some good and sufficing grounds.

Thus, in the evening, she complained to her attendant Dariole of a heaviness in the head, accompanied with faintness, these being the symptoms Henry had requested her to feign.

The next morning she seemed desirous of rising, but scarcely had she placed her foot on the floor than she complained of general weakness, and returned to her bed.

This indisposition, which Henry had already adverted to when speaking to the Duke d'Alençon, was the first information that Catherine received, when she inquired, with a calm air, why La Sauve did not attend her, as usual, when she arose.

"She is ill," said Madame de Lorraine, who was present.

"Ill," repeated Catherine, whilst not a muscle of her face announced the interest she took in the reply; "a little indolent, perhaps?"

"No, madame," replied the princess; "she complains of a violent pain in the head, and a weakness that prevents her from moving."

Catherine made no reply, but to conceal her joy, no doubt, turned towards the window, and seing Henry cross the courtyard, after his conversation with De Mouy, she said, as she looked at him, to her captain of the guards:

"Do you not think that my son Henry looks paler than usual this morning?"

It is true Henry was considerably disturbed in mind, but perfectly well in body.

Catherine's suite left her, and the instant she was alone, she closed the door securely, and going to a secret cupboard, she drew from a concealed corner a book, whose crumpled leaves proved how frequently it was made use of.

She placed the volume on a table, opened it, and after consulting its pages for a minute, exclaimed:

"Yes, it is so; headache, general weakness, pains in the eyes, swelling of the palate; as yet they only mention headache and weakness; but the other symptoms will appear anon. Then follow inflammation of the throat, which extends over the stomach, surrounds the heart with a circle of fire, and makes the brain burst like a stroke of lightning."

She read on in low tone, and then said:

"The fever lasts six hours, the general inflammation twelve hours, the gangrene twelve hours, the final agony six hours; in all thirty-six hours."

"Well, then, let us suppose that absorption is a slower process than swallowing; instead of thirty-six hours we shall have forty, or perhaps forty-eight—yes, forty-eight must be sufficient—but he—he—Henry—how is it that he is able to keep up? Why, because he is a man with a robust habit, and perhaps drank something after he had kissed her, and wiped his lips after drinking."

Catherine impatiently awaited the dinner-hour—Henry dined with the king daily. When he came, he complained of giddiness in the head, and did not eat, but withdrew immediately after dinner, saying that as he had been up nearly all the night before, he felt a great desire to sleep.

Catherine listened to Henry's retreating and staggering step, and desired some one to follow him, which was done, and the queen-mother was informed that the King of Navarre had gone towards Madame de Sauve's apartment.

"Henry," she said to herself, "will there complete the work of death which unlucky accident may hitherto have rendered incomplete."

The King of Navarre had gone to Madame de Sauve's apartment, to request her to continue to play her part.

Next day Henry did not quit his chamber all the morning, nor did he dine at the royal table. Madame de Sauve, it was reported, was worse and worse, and the rumors of Henry's illness, spread by Catherine herself, spread like one of those presentiments which no one can explain.

Catherine awaited, then, with curiosity, with expectation, the moment when some attendant, pale and aghast, should enter her apartment, and cry:

"Your majesty, the King of Navarre is dying, and Madame de Sauve is dead."

The clock struck four, and Catherine was feeding with crumbs of bread some rare birds which she herself attended to. Although her features were calm, and even melancholy, her heart beat violently at the least sound.

Suddenly the door opened.

"Madame," said the captain of the guards, "the King of Navarre is——"

"Ill?" inquired Catherine, suddenly.

"No, madame, thank God! his majesty seems excellently well."

"What then have you to say?"

"That the King of Navarre is here."

"What would he with me?"

"He brings your majesty a small monkey of a very rare sort."

And at this moment Henry entered, holding in his hand a basket, and caressing an onistiti (a small species of the monkey) which was in it.

Henry smiled as he entered, and appeared quite occupied with the small animal he had brought; but yet preoccupied as he was, he gave a glance which was sufficient under his peculiar circumstances. As to Catherine, she was very pale—deadly pale, indeed, as she saw the cheeks of the young man, as he approached her, glowing with color and health.

The queen-mother was stupefied at this, and accepting mechanically the present he made her, and complimenting him in a troubled voice on his healthy appearance, added:

"I am the more pleased to see you in such health, my son, after having heard that you had been unwell; and I remember you complained of indisposition in my presence; but I see now," she continued, trying to force a smile, "it was only an excuse that you might have your time more freely to yourself."

"Why, I really was very unwell, madame," replied Henry, "but a specific used in our mountains, and which my mother gave me, cured my indisposition."

"Ah! you will give me the prescription, won't you, Henry?" said Catherine, really smiling this time, but with irony half concealed.

"Some counter-poison," she muttered; "or he was on his guard: seeing Madame de Sauve ill, he had some distrust. Really, it would seem that the hand of Providence is extended over this man."

Catherine awaited for night most impatiently. Madame de Sauve did not appear; and it was stated that she was still worse. All the evening the queen-mother was uneasy; and every one asked, what could be the thoughts that thus agitated a countenance usually so little agitated.

Every one retired. Catherine went to bed, and was undressed by her woman; but, when all was hushed in the Louvre, she rose, put on a long black dressing gown, and with a lamp in her hand, having selected the key that opened Madame de Sauve's door, went to the apartment of her maid of honor.

Had Henry anticipated this visit? Was he in his own apartment? Was he hidden somewhere? The young lady was alone.

Catherine opened the door with precaution, passed through the antechamber, entered the saloon, placed the lamp on a table, for there was a night light burning near the invalid, and like a shadow she glided into the sleeping apartment.

Dariole, extended in a large armchair, was sleeping near her mistress's bed, which was closed in by curtains.

The breathing of the young lady was so light, that for an instant, Catherine thought she did not breathe at all.

At length she heard a light respiration, and, with malignant joy, she raised the curtain that she might herself witness the effect of the terrible poison, and she shuddered at the anticipated aspect of the livid paleness, or the devouring purple, of the mortal fever she hoped to see; but, instead of that, calm, her eyes gently covered by their ivory lids, her mouth rosy and half-opened, her soft cheek reposing on one of her arms, beautifully rounded, whilst the other, fresh and beautiful, was extended on the crimson damask counterpane, the young lady was sleeping with a smile on her lovely features.

Catherine could not repress a cry, which aroused Dariole for an instant.

The queen-mother threw herself behind the bed-curtains. Dariole opened her eyes, but being drowsy, she did not even try to account to herself for the cause of her awaking, and her heavy eyelids again dropping, she soon slept.

Catherine then coming from behind the curtain, looking all around, saw on a small table a flask of Spanish wine, some sweetmeats, and two glasses. Henry had supped with the baroness, who was as well as himself.

Catherine then going to the toilet-table, took up the small box, which was one-third empty. It was the same, or similar, to that she had given. She took from it a morsel of the size of a pearl, at the end of a gold pin, returned to her own apartment, and offered it to the small monkey which Henry had presented to her the same evening. The animal, tempted by the aromatic, seized and swallowed it greedily, and curling himself up in his basket, went to sleep. Catherine waited a quarter of an hour.

"With half such a piece," she said, "my dog Brunot died in a minute. I have been trifled with. Can it be René? René! that is impossible. Then, it is Henry. Cursed fatality, it is clear; as he must reign, he cannot die. Perhaps, it is only poison against which he is proof: let us then try cold steel."

Catherine went to her couch, turning over in her mind this fresh idea, which she resolved on essaying next day; and, in the morning, summoning the captain of her guards, she gave him a letter to convey to its address, and to be handed only to the person whose name it bore.

It was addressed to "Sire de Louviers de Maurevel, Captain of the King's Petardiers, Rue de la Cerisaie, near the Arsenal."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE LETTER FROM ROME.

SOME days had elapsed since the events we have related, when one morning a litter, escorted by several gentlemen wearing the colors of M. de Guise, entered the Louvre; and it was announced to the Queen of Navarre that the Duchess de Nevers desired to pay her respects to her.

Marguerite was receiving a visit from Madame de Sauve. It was the first time the lovely baroness had gone out since her pretended illness.

Marguerite congratulated her on her convalescence, and said:

"You will come, I hope, to the great hunt, which will certainly take place to-morrow."

"Why, madame," replied the baroness, "I do not know that I shall be well enough."

"Bah," replied Marguerite, "you must make an exertion; and as I myself am a regular warrior, I have authorized the king to place at your disposal a small Béarn horse, which I was to have ridden, and which will carry you famously. So you must accompany us."

"Your majesty overwhelms me, and I will be present, as you desire it."

At this moment the Duchess de Nevers was announced.

"To-morrow, then," said Marguerite to Madame de Sauve. "Apropos, you know, baroness," continued Marguerite, "that in public I detest you, seeing that I am horribly jealous of you."

"But in private?" asked Madame de Sauve.

"Oh! in private I not only forgive you, but even thank you."

"Then your majesty will allow me——"

Marguerite extended her hand, which the baroness kissed respectfully, made a low curtsey, and left the apartment.

The Duchess de Nevers entered. Gillonne, at the desire of her mistress, fastened the door, and the duchess, taking a seat without ceremony, Marguerite said to her, with a smile:

"Well! and our famous swordsman—what do we make out of him?"

"My dear queen," replied the duchess, "he is really a mythological being; he is incomparable in his mind, and endless in his humor; I am really fond of him: and how goes on your Apollo?"

"Alas!" said Marguerite, with a sigh.

"Ah, ah! that *alas!* frightens me, dear queen."

"This, *alas!* only refers to myself," replied Marguerite.

"And what does it mean?"

"It means, dear duchess, that I have an awful fear that I love him in real earnest."

"Really?"

"On my faith, as a woman!"

"Ah, so much the better!" cried Henriette. "It is so pleasant, dear and learned queen, to rest one's mind on a faithful and fond heart. Ah, Marguerite! I have a presentiment that we shall pass an agreeable year."

"Do you think so?" said the queen. "I, on the contrary, do not know how it is, but I appear to see everything as it were through a crape. All these political turmoils torment me terribly. By the way, learn if your Annibal is as much devoted to my brother as he appears to be. It is important to know this."

"He devoted to anything! Ah! I see, you do not know him as I do. If he is ever devoted, it will be to ambition, and nothing else. There are really moments when this tiger, whom I have trained, makes me afraid for myself. The other day I said to him: 'Annibal, mind and do not be false to me, for if you are false to me——'"

"Well?"

"Well, what do you suppose was his reply? Why, he said: 'And if you are false to me, do you take care, for although you are a princess——;' and as he said so, he threatened me not only with his eyes, but with his finger—his finger, straight and pointed, and with a nail cut like a spear-point, which he put quite close under my nose; really, my dear queen, I confess his countenance was so threatening that I trembled, and you know that ordinarily I am no trembler."

"Did he really threaten you, Henriette?"

"Yes, *mordi!* but I had threatened him, you see."

"Have you any news for me?"

"Yes, indeed; I have received news from Rome."

"Well! and matters in Poland?"

"Progress most favorably; and in all probability you will in a few days be freed from your brother D'Anjou."

"The pope, then, has ratified the election?"

"Yes, my dear."

'Why did you not tell me sooner? Come, quick, quick!—all the details."

' Oh, *ma foi!* I have none but what I have told you. But here is my husband De Nevers' letter. No, that is not it; that is a billet from me, which I will beg of you to ask La Mole to give to Annibal. This is the duke's letter."

Marguerite opened and read it eagerly, but it told no more than she knew before from the lips of her friend.

"And how did you receive this letter?" continued the queen.

By one of my husband's couriers, who had his orders to stop at the Hôtel de Guise on his way to the Louvre, and hand me this letter, before the king had his. I knew the importance which my queen attached to this news, and wrote to M. de Nevers to do so. And now in all Paris, none but the king, you and I, know this news, unless the man who followed our courier——"

"What man?"

"Oh, what a horrible business! Only imagine this poor messenger arriving tired, dusty, and jaded, after traveling for a whole week, day and night incessantly, constantly followed by a man of fierce visage, who had relays, like his own, and traveled as fast as he for these four hundred leagues, our courier expecting every moment to have a ball in his back. They both arrived at the Barrière St. Marcel at the same time—both descended the Rue Mouffetard at a gallop—both crossed the Cité ; but at the end of the bridge Nôtre-Dame, our courier turned to the right, while the other turned to the left by the Place du Châtelet, and passed along the Quais by the Louvre, like a bolt from a bow."

"Thanks! thanks! dearest Henriette," cried Marguerite ; "you are right, and your information is indeed interesting. Who this other courier is I will find out. Leave me now ; we meet to-night in the Rue Tizon, do we not, and to-morrow at the hunt ? I will tell you to-night what I wish you to learn from your Coconnas."

"Do not forget my letter."

"No, no ; be easy, he shall have it in time."

Madame de Nevers went away, and Marguerite instantly sent for Henry, who hastened to her, and she gave him the letter, and told him of the two couriers.

"Yes," said Henry ; "I saw one enter the Louvre."

"Perhaps for the queen-mother."

"No, for I went into the corridor, and no one passed."

"Then," said Marguerite, looking at her husband, "it must be for——"

"Your brother D'Alençon, eh ?" said Henry.

"Yes ; but how to ascertain ?"

"Can we not," asked Henry negligently, "send for one of the two gentlemen, and learn from him——"

"You are right, sire," replied Marguerite set at ease by her husband's proposition. "I will send for M. de la Mole ;" and calling Gillonne, she desired her to seek that gentleman, and bring him thither.

Henry seated himself at a table, on which was a German book with Albert Dürer's engravings, which he looked at with so much attention, that when La Mole appeared he did not seem to hear him, not even raising his head.

Marguerite went to La Mole, and said :

"M. de la Mole, can you tell me who is on guard today at M. d'Alençon's ?"

"Coconnas, madame," was the reply.

"Endeavor to learn if he has introduced to his master a man covered with mud, who seemed to have ridden a long and rapid journey?"

"Madame, I am afraid he will not tell me, for he has been uncommonly taciturn during the last few days."

"Really? Well, but if you give him this billet, I should think he would owe you something in exchange."

"From the duchess? Ah, madame, let me have it, and I will answer for all;" and taking the letter, he went quickly away.

"We shall know to-morrow if the Duke d'Alençon is informed of the affair of Poland," said Marguerite, turning towards her husband.

"This M. de la Mole is really a very capital servant," said the Béarnais, with his own most peculiar smile, "and, by the mass! I will make his fortune."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE DEPARTURE.

When the red rayless sun rose next morning over Paris, the court had already been in motion for two hours.

A splendid barb, agile as a deer, the swelling veins of whose neck indicated his high breeding, pawed impatiently in the court, awaiting the king; but his impatience was less than his master's, detained by his mother, who wished to speak of an affair of the greatest importance.

They were both in the great gallery: Catherine pale and cold as ever; Charles IX. biting his nails, and chastising the two favorite dogs which stood by him, clothed in the coat of mail which protected them from the boar's tusks. A shield emblazoned with the arms of France was attached to their chests, like that on the breasts of the royal pages.

"Listen, Charles," said Catherine. "None but you and I are aware of the approaching arrival of the Polish ambassadors; and yet the King of Navarre acts as if he knew of it. In spite of his pretended abjuration, he keeps up a correspondence with the Huguenots. Have you remarked how frequently he has gone out, within the last few days. He has money—he who never before had any; he purchases horses and weapons, and when it rains, he practises fencing."

"Bah! mother," cried Charles, impatiently; "do you think he is going to kill D'Anjou or myself; he must take a few more lessons first; for yesterday I touched with my foil the buttons on his doublet eleven times, though there are but six of them; and D'Anjou is even more skilful than I, or at least he says so."

"Attend, Charles," said Catherine, "and do not treat your mother's warnings with such levity. These ambassadors will soon arrive; once here, you will see Henry doing his best to gain their attention; he is very insinuating and cunning, and his wife, who now abets him, I don't understand why, will chatter Latin and Greek, Hungarian, and I know not what else, with them. I tell you, Charles, and I am never mistaken, there is something in hand."

At this moment the clock struck. Charles listened.

"*Mort de ma vie!* seven: an hour to get there, an hour more at cover; zounds! it will be nine before we are at it! Down, Risque-tout!—down, you rascal!"

And as he spoke, a vigorous lash drew from the poor hound, astonished at receiving chastisement instead of a caress, a yell of agony.

"Charles," resumed Catherine, "attend to me, and do not thus put to hazard your own fortune and that of France. The chase! the chase! you will have time enough for the chase, when you have completed the work before us."

"Bah! bah! mother," said Charles, pale with rage; "tell me at once, what you want."

And he struck his boot with his whip.

Catherine saw the favorable moment had arrived, and determined not to let it slip.

"My son," said she, "we know that M. de Mouy is again in Paris ; M. de Maurevel has seen him. He can only be here for the King of Navarre's purposes. Here is good ground for increased suspicion."

"Ah, here you are again at poor Harry! I suppose you want me to kill him."

"Oh no!"

"To banish him? But don't you perceive he would be more formidable at a distance, than here, in the Louvre, where we know everything he does?"

"No, I don't want to banish him."

"What then? Come, quick!"

"I would have him confined while the Poles are here; in the Bastille, for instance."

"Oh, *Ma foi!* no," cried Charles IX. "We are going to hunt the boar this morning; Henry is one of my best assistants. The chase would be nothing without him. *Mordieu!* you do nothing but annoy me."

"My son, I do not say to-day; to-morrow will be time enough!"

"Ah, that is different; we will speak again of this, after the hunt, say. Adieu! Come, Risque-tout, don't be sulky!"

"Charles," said Catherine, taking hold of his arm, spite of the explosion she knew might follow, "I think it would be best to sign the warrant at once, although we do not execute it to-night."

"Sign! write an order! go and look for the seal, when I am going to hunt? Devil take me if I do!"

"Nay, I love you too much to delay you; I have everything prepared."

And Catherine, agile as a girl, opened the door of her private cabinet, and showed the king an inkstand, a pen, a parchment, and a lighted taper.

The king rapidly run his eye over the parchment:

"Order, etc., etc., to arrest and conduct to the Bastille our brother Henry of Navarre."

"There!" said he, hastily affixing his name to it.

And he sprang out of the cabinet, glad to escape so easily.

Charles was waited for impatiently ; and as his punctuality in hunting arrangements was well known, his non-appearance occasioned no small surprise. The instant he appeared, the hunters saluted him with cheers, the whippers-in with their horns, the horses with neighings, and the hounds with their most sweet voices. Charles, for a moment, was young and happy amidst all this noise, and the color mounted up into his pallid cheeks.

He scarcely gave himself time to return the salutations of the brilliant assembly. He nodded to D'Alençon, waved his hand to Marguerite, passed Henry without seeming to observe him, and sprang upon the horse that awaited him. The noble animal bounded impatiently, but soon comprehending with how perfect an equestrian it had to deal, became quiet.

The horns once more sounded, and the King left the Louvre, followed by the Duke d'Alençon, the King of Navarre, Marguerite, Madame de Nevers, Madame de Sauve, Tavannes, and the chief nobles of the court.

As for the Duke d'Anjou, he had been at the siege of Rochelle for the last three months.

Whilst waiting for the king, Henry had approached his wife, who whispered :

"The courier from Rome was conducted by M. de Coconnas to the Duke d'Alençon a quarter of an hour before the Duke de Nevers' messenger saw the king."

"Then he knows all."

"He needs must. Look at him ; despite his accomplished dissimulation, he cannot conceal his joy."

"*Ventre-saint-gris!*" said the Béarnais, "he is hunting three thrones to-day : France, Poland, and Navarre, without reckoning the boar."

Then, saluting his wife, Henry returned to his place, and called one of his servants, a Béarnese, whom he was in the habit of employing in his love affairs.

"Orthon," said he, "take this key to Madame de Sauve's cousin, at his house, the corner of the Rue des Quatre-fils. Tell him his cousin wishes to see him this evening ; that he is to go to my chamber ; if I am not there, he is to wait for me; and if I am late, he can lay down in my bed."

"There is no answer, sire?"

"None, except to tell me if you have seen him. The key is for him only, you understand?"

"Yes, sire."

"Stop, blockhead, you must not go off now: it would create observation. Before we leave Paris, I will call you, as if my girth was slackened; then you can wait behind, discharge your commission, and join us at Bondy."

Orthon bowed and drew back.

The cavalcade passed down the Rue St.-Honoré, the Rue St.-Denis, then the Fauxbourg. At the Rue St.-Laurent, the king's saddle became ungirthed; Orthon galloped up, and everything passed as the king had arranged. The royal cortége passed down the Rue des Récollets, and the faithful valet dashed into the Rue du Temple.

When Henry rejoined the king, he was so busy talking to D'Alençon about the expected boar, that he either did not perceive or affected not to perceive that Henry had stayed behind.

Madame Marguerite remarked that her brother seemed embarrassed whenever he glanced at Henry. Madame de Nevers was in high glee, for Coconnas was in capital vein with his jests.

At a quarter-past eight, the cortége arrived at Bondy.

Charles's first care was to inquire whether the boar had broken cover. The boar, however, the huntsman assured him, was still in his lair.

A collation was prepared; the king drank a glass of Hungarian wine; then, inviting the ladies to seat themselves, he went to inspect the kennels and the mews, having first given strict orders that his horse should not be unsaddled meanwhile.

During his absence, the Duke de Guise arrived; he was armed as if for war, rather than for the chase, and was attended by twenty or thirty gentlemen in similar array. He went to seek the king, and returned conversing with him.

At nine o'clock, the king himself sounded the signal for departure, and every one mounting, hastened to the place of meeting.

During the journey, Henry again approached his wife.

"Well," said he, "anything new?"

"Nothing, except that my brother looks very strangely at you."

"I have remarked it myself."

"Have you taken your precautions?"

"I have my shirt of mail on, and an excellent Spanish couteau-de-chasse, sharp as a razor, pointed as a needle, with which I can pierce a crown-piece."

"Well," said Marguerite, "may God guard us!"

The huntsman gave a signal; they were at the boar's lair.

CHAPTER XXX.

MAUREVEL.

WHILST the glittering cortége proceeded towards Bondy, the queen-mother, rolling up the parchment the king had signed, gave orders to have introduced to her presence the man to whom the captain of her guards had remitted a letter some days previously, "Rue de la Cerisaie, Quartier de l'Arsenal."

A large band of sarsanet covered one of his eyes and only just left the other visible. His cheek-bones were high, and his nose curved like the beak of a vulture; a grizzled beard covered his chin; he wore a large thick cloak, beneath which were evident the hilts of a whole arsenal of weapons. He had at his side a heavy broadsword, with a basket hilt, and one of his hands grasped underneath his cloak a long poniard.

"Ah, you are here!" said the queen, seating herself. "I promised to reward you for the services you rendered us the night of the St. Bartholomew, and I have found an opportunity of so doing."

"I humbly thank your majesty," replied the man.

"An opportunity, such as may never again present itself, of distinguishing yourself."

"I am ready, madame; but I fear, from the preamble, that——"

"That the commission is a rough one. It is, indeed; 'tis one which might be coveted by a Guise or a Tavannes."

"Madame, whatever it be, I am at your orders."

"Read that," said Catherine; and she gave him the parchment.

He read it, and turned pale.

"What!" cried he; "an order to arrest the King of Navarre?"

"Well, what is there so very astonishing in that!"

"But a king, madame! I doubt if I am gentleman enough to arrest a king."

"The confidence I repose in you makes you the first gentleman in my court."

"I thank your majesty," returned the assassin—with some hesitation, however.

"You will obey me, then?"

"If your majesty commands me, it is my duty to obey."

"I do command you."

"Then I obey."

"How will you proceed?"

"I scarcely know—I would fain be guided by your majesty."

"You would do it quietly."

"I confess it."

"Take twelve men, or even more, if necessary."

"I understand; your majesty permits me to make use of every advantage. But where shall I seize the King of Navarre?"

"Where would you prefer?"

"I should prefer some place where my responsibility——"

"Ah, I understand—a royal palace: the Louvre, for instance."

"Oh, if your majesty would permit this it would be a great favor."

"Arrest him in the Louvre, then."

"In what part?"

"In his own apartments."

Maurevel bowed.

"And when, madame?"

"To-night."

"It shall be done, madame. But deign to tell me what regard I am to have for his rank!"

"Regard!—rank!" said Catherine. "Know you not that the King of France acknowledges no one of a rank equal to his own in France?"

"Yet one other question, madame. Should the king contest the authenticity of this order—it is not unlikely—but——"

"On the contrary, it is certain——"

"That he will contest it?"

"Without doubt."

"And that, consequently, he will refuse to obey it?"

"I fear so."

"And will resist it?"

"Most likely."

"Zounds!" said Maurevel; "in that case——"

"In what case?" asked Catherine.

"In case he resists."

"What do you do when you have the king's warrant, and a simple gentleman resists you?"

"I kill him, madame," returned the bravo.

"I told you just now that every one in France is, in the king's eyes, but a simple gentleman."

Maurevel turned pale, for he began to understand.

"Oh, oh!" said he, "kill the King of Navarre!"

"Who spoke of killing him? This order is only to conduct him to the Bastille. If he suffers himself to be arrested quietly, well and good: but if he resists, and seeks to kill you——"

Maurevel grew still paler.

"You will, of course, defend yourself. A bravo soldier like you cannot be expected to suffer himself to be killed; and then, in your own defense, happen what will—you understand?"

"Yes, madame."

"Come, you want me to write on the order the words—*Dead or alive?*"

"I confess that would remove my scruples."

"Well—I must do it, I suppose."

And unrolling the warrant with one hand, with the other she wrote, "*Dead or alive.*"

"Is the order sufficiently formal now?" she asked.

"Yes, madame; but I pray you, let me have the execution of it entirely to myself."

"Will anything I have said interfere?"

"Your majesty bade me take twelve men."

"Well?"

"I request your permission to take only six."

"Why?"

"Because six guards may be excused for being afraid of losing a prisoner; twelve would never be."

"Do as you will," said Catherine. "Meantime, you must not quit the Louvre."

"But how shall I collect my men?"

"Have you no person you can employ in this?"

"There is my servant, a trusty fellow, who sometimes aids me in such things."

"Send for him and arrange your plans. You will breakfast in the king's armory. When he returns from hunting, you can go to my oratory, and wait there till the hour comes."

"How shall we get into the king's chamber? he, doubtless, has his suspicions, and fastens the door within."

"I have keys that open all the doors in the Louvre; and the bolts have been removed from his door. Adieu, M. de Maurevel. Remember, any failure would compromise the king's honor."

And Catherine, without leaving Maurevel time to reply, called M. de Nancey the captain of her guards, and bade him conduct Maurevel into the king's armory.

"*Mordieu!*" said Maurevel. "I am rising in my profession. First I killed a simple gentleman, then I shot at an admiral, now 'tis a king without a crown: who knows but some day I may have to settle a king with a crown!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE BOAR-HUNT.

THE huntsman was not deceived when he affirmed that the game had not broken covert. Scarcely had the hounds entered, when the boar, which was, as the huntsman had said, one of the largest size, appeared.

The animal passed within fifty paces of the king, followed only by the hound which had roused him; but twenty dogs were speedily uncoupled, and laid on his track.

The chase was Charles's passion; and scarcely had the animal appeared than he dashed after him, followed by the Duke d'Alençon and Henry, who had received a sign from Marguerite, warning him not to lose sight of the king. The other huntsmen followed.

In a quarter of an hour some impassable thickets presented themselves, and Charles returned to the glade, cursing and swearing as was his wont:

"Zounds! D'Alençon, zounds! Harry, here you are, calm and milklike as nuns following the abbess in procession. Do you call that hunting? You, D'Alençon, look as if you had just come out of a box; you are so perfumed, that if you get between the boar and the dogs, you will spoil the scent; and you, Harry, where is your boar-spear? where is your arquebuss?"

"Sire," said Henry, "what is the use of an arquebuss? I know your majesty likes to shoot the boar at bay. As for the boar-spear, it is never used in my country, where we hunt the bear with the simple poniard."

"*Mordieu!*" replied Charles, "you must send me a cartload of bears when you go back to the Pyrenees. It must be glorious sport to contend foot to foot with an animal that may strangle one in a minute. Hark! I think I hear them. No!"

The king blew a blast on his horn that was answered by several others. At this moment a huntsman appeared, and sounded another note.

"Seen! seen!" cried the king; and he set spurs to his horse, followed by all around him.

The huntsman was right: as the king advanced, the pack, now composed of more than sixty dogs, was heard distinctly. The king no sooner saw the boar pass a second time, than he pursued him at full speed, blowing his horn with all his might.

The princes followed him some time; but the king's horse was so strong, and bore him over such difficult ways, through such thick coverts, that first the ladies, then the Duke de Guise and the gentlemen, and then the two princes, were fain to draw rein. Tavannes followed him awhile longer, but he, in his turn, was compelled to give it up.

All then, except the king and a few huntsmen, incited by the hope of reward, found themselves near the glade they had started from. The two princes were side by side in a long, broad forest path, the Duke de Guise and his attendants at some little distance on.

"Does it not seem," said the Duke d'Alençon to Henry, "that this man, with his armed retinue, is the real king? He does not deign to glance at us poor princes."

"Why should he treat us better than we are treated by our own relations? You and I are but the hostages of our party at the court."

The duke started and looked at Henry, as if calling for further explanation, but the latter remained silent.

"What mean you?" asked François, evidently chagrined at his brother-in-law's compelling him to pursue the subject.

"I mean," returned Henry, "that all these armed men seem like guards stationed to prevent two persons from escaping."

"From escaping! why? how?" asked the duke, with admirably affected surprise.

"You have a magnificent genet there, D'Alençon," said Henry, affecting to change the conversation, and yet adroitly pursuing the subject; "I am sure he would do fourteen miles in an hour, and forty between this and midday. See, what a beautiful cross-road there is that way: does it not invite you to loosen rein? As for me, I should like a gallop vastly."

François made no reply, but turned very red, and affected to listen for the hunters.

"The news from Poland has taken effect," thought Henry. "My dear brother-in-law has a plan of his own. He is willing enough I should be off; but I don't fly alone, he may rely upon it."

At this moment, several converts from Protestantism, who had been but a short time at the court, came up, and saluted the princes with a meaning smile.

The Duke d'Alençon needed but to say one word, to make but one sign; for it was evident that the thirty or forty cavaliers collected, as if by chance, round him, were ready to oppose M. de Guise's troop, and favor his flight. The duke, however, turned his head, and placing his horn to his lips, blew a recall.

Still, the newcomers, as if they believed the duke's hesitation arose from the presence of the Guisards, gradually placed themselves between that party and the princes, in a manner that showed they were well accustomed to military maneuvers. In order to reach the Duke d'Alençon and the King of Navarre, it would be necessary for the Guise party to pass through them; whilst as far as the eye could reach, the cross-road was free.

Suddenly, between the trees, at ten paces from the king, appeared a gentleman, whom the two princes had not yet seen. Whilst Henry was conjecturing who he could be, he raised his hat, and displayed the features of the Vicomte de Turenne, one of the Protestant leaders, who was believed to be in Poictou.

The vicomte made a sign that asked:

"Will you come?"

But Henry, after consulting the immovable visage of the Duke d'Alençon, turned his head two or three times, as if something in his collar hurt him.

The vicomte understood him, and instantly disappeared.

Suddenly the hounds were again heard; and at the extremity of the ride, in which were the princes, the boar passed, and then the dogs, and then, looking like the wild huntsman, Charles, bareheaded, and blowing his horn furiously: three or four huntsmen rode after him: Tavannes was not there.

"The king!" cried D'Alençon, and he instantly galloped after him.

Reassured by the presence of his friends, whom he motioned not to leave him, Henry advanced to the ladies.

"Well," said Marguerite.

"Well, madame," said Henry, "we are hunting the boar."

"Is that all?"

"The wind has changed since the morning, as I predicted to you it would."

"These changes of the wind are very bad for hunting, are they not, sir?" said Marguerite.

"Yes; sometimes they disturb all our arrangements, and we have to form a new plan altogether."

The pack was now heard, and every one turned to listen.

Suddenly the boar broke out of the wood, and dashed by the ladies and their gallants.

Behind him, close on his haunches, came forty or fifty hounds, and then the king, bareheaded, without hat or mantle, his dress torn by the thorns, his hands and face all bloody; only one or two huntsmen kept up with him.

"Hallali! hallali!" cried he, as he passed, placing his horn to his bleeding lips, and boar, dogs, and king disappeared like a vision.

Immediately after them came D'Alençon, and two or three piqueurs.

Every one followed, for it was plain the boar would soon be brought to bay.

And so it happened: in less than ten minutes, the boar, coming to an open spot, placed his back against a rock, and prepared himself for a desperate struggle.

The most interesting moment of the chase was come: the dogs, though well-nigh breathless with a chase of more than three hours, rushed upon the boar.

All the hunters ranged themselves in a circle—the king a little in advance, the Duke d'Alençon behind him with his arquebuss, and Henry, who had only his hunting-knife.

The Duke d'Alençon lighted the match of his arquebuss; Henry loosened his knife in its sheath.

The Duke de Guise, who despised all such sports, remained in the background with his party.

At some distance was a piqueur, who with difficulty held back the king's two huge boar-hounds, which, struggling and baying, awaited anxiously the moment when they should be let loose upon their prey.

The animal fought most gallantly; attacked at once by forty dogs, surrounding him like a raging sea, he at every stroke of his tusk hurled into the air one of the gallant creatures, torn and dying. In ten minutes, twenty dogs were killed or disabled.

"Let loose the hounds!" cried the king.

The piqueur opened the swivel of the leashes, and the two huge animals, protected by their coats of mail, dashed through the thickest of the fray, and seized the boar each by an ear.

"Bravo, Risque-tout! bravo, Dure-Dent!" cried Charles. "A boar-spear! a boar-spear!"

"Will you have my arquebuss?" said D'Alençon.

"No, no!" cried the king, "there is no pleasure in shooting him; but 'tis delicious to feel the spear going in. A spear! a spear!"

One was presented to him.

"Take care, Charles," said Marguerite.

"To him! to him!"

"Do not miss him, sire. Pierce the heretic through and through!" cried the Duchess de Nevers.

"Never fear!" replied the king; and leveling his spear, he rushed at the boar. But at the sight of the glittering steel, the animal made so sudden a movement, that the spear glanced off his shoulder, and broke against the rock. "*Milles noms d'un diable!* I have missed!" cried Charles, impatiently. "Another spear!"

And backing his steed, like the knights of old in a tournament, he cast away the broken weapon.

A piqueur advanced to offer him another.

But as if he foresaw his fate, and sought to avoid it, the boar, by a violent effort, burst from the dogs, and, his hair bristling, his mouth foaming with rage, and clashing his tusks together, he rushed at Charles.

The king was too good a sportsman not to have foreseen this attack. Pulling hard on the rein, he made his horse rear; but either from the curb being too tightly pressed, or from fear, the animal fell back upon his rider.

A cry burst from every one; the king's thigh was caught between the saddle and the ground.

"Let the bridle go, sire," cried Henry.

The king abandoned his hold of the rein, seized the saddle with his left hand, and with his right strove to draw his hunting-knife, but in vain; the sheath was so tightly pressed by his body as to render that impossible.

"The boar! the boar!" cried Charles. "Help, help, D'Alençon."

The horse, as if he comprehended the danger of his master, rose on his forefeet, when Henry saw D'Alençon turn ghastly pale as he placed his arquebuss to his shoulder and fired. The ball, instead of hitting the boar, struck the foreleg of the king's horse, which instantly fell again.

"Oh!" murmured D'Alençon, his lips blanched with fear, "I think that D'Anjou is King of France, and I King of Poland!"

And, in fact, the boar's tusk already grazed Charles' thigh, when the king felt his arm raised, and saw a bright blade flash before his eyes, and bury itself up to the hilt behind the boar's shoulder, while a hand, gloved in iron, was dashed against the mouth of the monster.

Charles had by this time freed himself from his struggling horse, and rose with difficulty; when he saw his dress streaming with blood, he grew still paler than before.

"Sire," said Henry, who, still on one knee, kept his knife in the boar's breast, "you are not hurt; I turned the tusk aside in time." He then rose, leaving the knife in the boar, which turned over dead, bleeding still more profusely from the mouth even than from the wound.

Charles, surrounded by a crowd of courtiers, all sending forth cries of terror, seemed for a moment about to fall by the dead boar; but recovering himself, he turned to the King of Navarre, with his eyes beaming with the first ray of sensibility that had touched his heart for full four-and-twenty years.

"Thanks! Harry," said he.

"My poor brother," said D'Alençon, coming up to him.

"Ah, is that you, D'Alençon!" cried the king. "Well, famous marksman that you are, where is your ball?"

"It must have flattened upon the boar, no doubt."

"Eh, *mon Dieu*," said Henry, with an air of surprise, admirably feigned, "your ball has broken the leg of the king's horse. How very singular!"

"Ah! is that so?" said the king.

"Perhaps," replied the duke, all consternation; "my hand trembled so."

"Humph! for a first-rate marksman you made a most curious shot, D'Alençon," said Charles, frowning; "once more, Harry, thanks!"

Marguerite advanced to congratulate the king, and thank her husband.

"Oh, by my faith, Margot, you may well thank him, heartily," said Charles; "but for him the King of France would be Henry III."

"Alas, madame," returned Henry, "M. d'Anjou, who is already my enemy, will be more than ever so, now; but every one does what he can. Ask M. d'Alençon else——"

And, stooping down, he withdrew his knife from the body of the boar, and plunged it several times into the earth to cleanse it from the blood.

"And now, ladies and gentlemen," said the king, "homeward! I have had enough for one day."

CHAPTER XXXII.

FRATERNITY.

In saving the life of Charles, Henry had done more than save the life of a man—he had prevented three kingdoms from changing sovereigns.

Had Charles IX. been killed, the Duke d'Anjou would have been King of France, and the Duke d'Alençon most probably King of Poland. As to Navarre, as the Duke d'Anjou was enamored of Madame de Condé, that crown would in all probability have paid the husband for the complaisance of his wife.

In all this confusion, nothing beneficial would have arisen for Henry. He would have changed his master, that was all; and instead of Charles IX., who tolerated him, he would have seen the Duke d'Anjou on the throne, who, having but one head and one heart with his mother Catherine, had sworn his death, and would have kept his oath.

These were the ideas that floated through his brain when the wild boar had rushed on King Charles, and we have seen the result of this reflection, rapid as lightning, that the life of Charles IX. was bound up with his own existence.

Charles IX., then, was saved by a devotion, whose spring and action he could not comprehend. Marguerite, however, had comprehended it fully, and had admired the strange courage of Henry, which, like lightning, shone only in the dark.

Henry, as he returned to Bondy, reflected deeply on his situation, and when he reached the Louvre, he had resolved on his plan of action. Without taking off his boots, but all dusty and covered with blood as he was, he went to the Duke d'Alençon, whom he found greatly agitated, and pacing hastily up and down his chamber.

The prince started when he saw him.

"Yes," said Henry, to him, taking both his hands, "yes, I understand, my good brother, you are angry with me, because I was the first to call the king's attention to the fact of your ball having struck his horse's leg instead of the boar, as was your aim. But I could not repress an exclamation, and besides, the king had perceived it."

"Doubtless, doubtless!" muttered D'Alençon; "yet I cannot but attribute to a bad intention your pointing out this fact, which you must have seen has made my brother Charles suspicious of my purpose, and thrown a cloud between us."

"We will talk of this anon; and as to my good or bad intention, I have come now to make you a judge of that."

"Humph," said D'Alençon.

"My brother, your interests are too dear to me to allow me to keep from you that the Huguenots have made me certain proposals——"

"Proposals? what sort of proposals?"

"One of the leaders, M. de Mouy de Saint-Phale, and son of the brave De Mouy assassinated by Maurevel, has been with me at the risk of his life, to prove to me that I was in captivity."

"Ah, indeed, and what reply did you make?"

"My brother, you know how tenderly I love Charles, who saved my life; and that the queen-mother has been a mother to me. I have therefore refused all the offers he made me."

"And what were these offers?"

"The Huguenots wished to reconstitute the throne of Navarre; and as in reality this throne belonged to me by inheritance, they offered it to me."

"Yes, and M. de Mouy, instead of the adhesion he had entreated, received your refusal?"

"Most decidedly; but since——" continued Henry.

"You have repented, my brother?" interrupted D'Alençon.

"No; but I have found that M. de Mouy, enraged at my refusal, has cast his eyes in another direction."

"Whither?" asked François, quickly.

"I do not know; on the Prince de Condé, perchance."

"Very probably," was the reply.

"I have, however, a certain means of ascertaining the chief he has selected."

François became very pale.

"But," continued Henry, "the Huguenots are divided amongst themselves; and De Mouy, brave and loyal as he is, represents but one half the party. Now, the other half, which is not to be despised, has not lost all hope of seeing on the throne that Henry of Navarre, who, after having hesitated in the first instance, may have reflected afterwards."

"Do you think so?"

"I have daily proofs of this. The troop that joined us at the hunt—did you remark the men who composed it?"

"Yes; they were converted gentlemen."

"The chief of this troop, who made me a sign—did you recognize him?"

"Yes; it was the Vicomte de Turenne."

"Did you understand what they wished?"

"Yes; they proposed to you to fly."

"Then," said Henry, "it is evident that there is a second party with different views from M. de Mouy, and that a very powerful one; so that, in order to succeed, it is requisite to unite the two parties, Turenne and De Mouy. The conspiracy strengthens—troops are ready—they but await the signal—and between my two resolutions I waver; and have, therefore, come to submit them to you as a friend."

"Say rather as a brother!"

"First, let me expose the state of my mind, my dear François: no desire, no ambition, no capacity. I am a good sort of country gentleman—poor, indolent, and timid: the idea of conspirator presents to me a chance of disgrace, badly compensated by even the assured perspective of a crown."

"Ah, my brother!" said François, "you are wrong; "nothing can be more pitiable than the position of a prince whose fortune is limited by a landmark, or by some individual in the career of honor. I cannot, therefore, credit what you say."

"Yet I speak only the truth, my brother," was Henry's reply; "and if I could believe that I had a real friend, I would resign in his favor all the power which the party attached to me would confer; but," he added with a sigh, "I have not one."

"Perhaps you are mistaken."

"No, *ventre-saint-gris!*" cried Henry. "Except yourself, brother, I see no one who is attached to me; and then, I must inform my brother the king of all that is going on. I will name no person—I will not mention country, nor date; but I will prevent the catastrophe."

"*Grand Dieu!*" exclaimed D'Alençon, who could not repress his alarm; "what are you saying? You, the sole hope of the party since the admiral's death; you, a converted Huguenot—scarce converted, as it would seem—would you raise the knife against your brothers? Henry, Henry, in doing that you will hand over to a second Saint Bartholomew all the Calvinists of the kingdom! Do you know that Catherine only awaits such an opportunity to exterminate all the survivors?"

And the trembling duke, his face marked with red and livid spots, pressed Henry's hand, in his eagerness to make him promise to renounce a resolution which must destroy him.

"What!" said Henry, with an air of much surprise, "do you think, François, that so many misfortunes must then occur? Yet it seems to me that, with the king's guarantee, I could save the imprudent partisans."

"The guarantee of King Charles the Ninth, Henry? Did not the admiral have it? Teligny? yourself? Ah, Henry! I tell you, if you do this, you destroy them all; not only them, but also all directly or indirectly connected with them."

Henry appeared to reflect for a moment:

"If," he said, "I were an important prince at court, I should act otherwise; in your place, for instance, François, a son of France, and probable heir to the throne."

François shook his head skeptically, and said, "What would you do in my place?"

"In your place, my brother," replied Henry, "I should put myself at the head of this movement. My name and credit would answer to my conscience for the life of the seditious; and I would derive from it something useful for myself, in the first instance, and then for the king; and this from an enterprise which otherwise may terminate in great mischief for France."

D'Alençon listened to these words with a joy which expanded all the muscles of his face, and replied:

"Do you think this practicable, and will avoid all those evils which you foresee?"

"I do," said Henry. "The Huguenots like you: your modest exterior, your situation, elevated and interesting at the same time, and the kindness you have always evinced to those of the Reformed faith, induce them to serve you."

"But," said D'Alençon, "there is a schism in the party: will those who are for you be for me?"

"I will undertake to conciliate them, on two grounds."

"What are they?"

"In the first place, through the confidence which the chiefs have in me; then from their fear when your highness, knowing their names—— But without further persuasion, my brother, take up this matter. Reign in Navarre; and so that you keep for me a place at your table and a good forest for hunting, I shall be perfectly happy."

"Reign in Navarre!" said the duke; "but if——"

"If the Duke d'Anjou is named King of Poland?—you would say."

François cast a look of terror on Henry.

"If the Duke d'Anjou is nominated King of Poland, and our brother Charles (whom God preserve!) should die, it is but two hundred leagues from Pau to Paris, whilst it is four hundred from Paris to Cracow; and you would be here to claim the inheritance at the moment when the King of Poland would only have learned of its being vacated. Then, if you are satisfied with me, François, you may give me this kingdom of Navarre, which will then be only one of the offshoots of your crown. Under these circumstances I would accept it. The worst that can arrive is, to remain king there, and live *en famille* with me and my wife; whilst here, what are you?—a poor, persecuted prince, a poor third son of the king, a slave of two elder brothers, whom a caprice may send to the Bastille."

"Yes, yes," said François: "I feel all this so well, that I cannot understand how you renounce all the hopes that you propose for me."

"There are," said Henry, with a smile, "burdens too heavy for certain hands. I shall not try to lift this one."

"Then, Henry, you really renounce?"

"I said so to De Mouy, and I repeat it to you."

"But in such cases, brother," said D'Alençon, "men do not *say*, they prove."

"I will prove it this evening," was the reply; "at nine o'clock, the list of the chiefs and the plan of the enterprise shall be in your hands."

François took Henry's hand, and pressed it with fervor.

At the same moment, Catherine entered the apartment, and, as usual, without being announced.

"Together," she said, with a smile, "like two loving brothers."

"I hope so, madame," replied Henry, with the utmost composure, whilst the Duke d'Alençon turned pale with agony.

The queen-mother then took from her gypsire a magnificent jewel, and said to François (from whom Henry had receded several paces), "This clasp comes from Florence, and I give it you to fasten your sword;" then she added, in a low voice: "If you should hear any noise this evening in the apartment of your good brother Henry, do not heed it."

François grasped his mother's hand, and said: "Will you allow me to show him the handsome present you have just made me?"

"Do still better; give it to him in your own and my name, for I had ordered a second for that purpose."

"Do you hear, Henry?" said François; "my good mother brings me this jewel, and redoubles its value by allowing me to offer it to you."

Henry went into rapture sat the beauty of the jewel, and was profuse in his thanks.

"My son," said Catherine, "I do not feel well, and am going to bed. Your brother Charles is much shaken by his fall, and wishes to do the same thing. We shall not, therefore, all sup together.—Ah, Henry! I forgot to compliment you on your courage and skill: you have saved your king and brother, and you must be recompensed for such high service."

"I am recompensed already," replied Henry, with a bow.

"By the feeling that you have done your duty?" was Catherine's reply; "but that is not enough for Charles and myself, and we must devise some means of requiting our obligations towards you."

"All that may come from you and my good brother must be welcome, madame," was Henry's reply; and, bowing, he left the apartment.

"Ah, my worthy brother François!" thought Henry, as he went out; "no, I am sure not to go away alone; and the conspiracy, which had a heart, has now found a head, and what is still better, this head is responsible to me for my own: only let us be on our guard. Catherine has made me a present—Catherine promises me a recompense; there is some devilry or other, then, brewing, and I will have a conversation this evening with Marguerite."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE GRATITUDE OF KING CHARLES THE NINTH.

MAUREVEL had remained for a portion of the day in the king's armory; and when Catherine saw the moment approach of the return from the chase, she had desired him and his satellites to pass into her oratory.

Charles IX., informed by his nurse, on his arrival, who the man was, and remembering the order his mother had extracted from him in the morning, understood everything.

"Ah, ah!" he murmured, "the time is ill-chosen, on the very day on which he has saved my life."

And he was about to go to his mother, but suddenly changed his intention.

"*Mordieu!*" he exclaimed, "if I speak to her of it, what a discussion will ensue! We had better act each for one's self.—Nurse," he continued, "shut all the doors, and inform the Queen Elizabeth" (Charles IX. was married to Elizabeth of Austria, daughter of Maximilian), "that, being rather unwell from my fall, I shall sleep in my own apartment to-night."

The nurse obeyed; and as the hour for his plan had not arrived, Charles began to write verses. It was the occupation in which he most delighted: and thus nine o'clock struck, when Charles thought it was only seven. He counted the strokes one after the other, and at the last he rose: "*Nom d'un diable!*" he exclaimed, "it is precisely the time."

Taking his cloak and hat, he went out by a secret door which he had made in the paneling, and of the existence of which Catherine herself was ignorant.

Charles went straight to Henry's apartment. Henry had only gone thither to change his dress, when he left the Duke d'Alençon, and had then left it instantly.

"He must have gone to sup with Marguerite," said the king to himself; "he was on the best possible terms with her; at least, it appeared so to me;" and he went towards Marguerite's apartment.

Marguerite had invited to her rooms the Duchess de Nevers, Coconnas, and La Mole, and they were enjoying a repast of pastry and sweetmeats.

Charles knocked at the door: Gillonne went to open it, and was so frightened at the sight of the king, that she could scarcely curtsey to him; and instead of running to inform her mistress of the august visit which was paid her, she allowed Charles to pass her without any other signal than the cry she had uttered.

The king crossed the antechamber, and, guided by the shouts and laughter, advanced towards the dining-room.

"Poor Harry!" he ejaculated, "he is making merry, quite unconscious of his danger."

"Tis I!" he said, aloud, and raising the tapestry, presented his face, which was all smiling.

Marguerite uttered a terrible cry. All joyous as was the king's face, it produced on her the effect of a Medusa's head. She had recognized Charles.

The two men had their backs turned to the king.

"His majesty!" she exclaimed, in a tone of affright, and she rose from her seat.

Coconnas, whilst the three others felt quite bewildered, was the only one who preserved his presence of mind. He also rose, but with well-contrived awkwardness, upset the table, with its glass, plates, and wax lights; and in a moment there was complete darkness, and the silence of death.

"Steal off!" said Coconnas to La Mole; "quick—quick, and cleverly."

La Mole did not wait for a second hint, but feeling along the wall with his hands, groped his way into the bedchamber, that he might hide in the closet he knew so well.

But as he entered the sleeping room, he came in contact with a man who entered by the secret passage.

"What can all this mean?" said Charles, in the dark, with a voice that was beginning to sound very impatiently; "am I an intruder, that on my appearance such a scene of confusion takes place. Harry—Harry! where are you? —answer me!"

"We are saved!" whispered Marguerite, taking a hand which she supposed to be that of Coconnas; "the king thinks that my husband is one of the guests."

"And he shall think so still, madame, be assured," said Henry himself to the queen, in the same tone.

"*Grand Dieu!*" exclaimed Marguerite, suddenly quitting her grasp of the hand she held.

"Hush!" said Henry.

"In the name of ten thousand devils! what are you all whispering for?" cried Charles. "Henry, answer—where are you?"

"I am here, sire," said the voice of the King of Navarre.

"The devil!" said Coconnas; "the plot thickens."

"And we are doubly lost," added the Duchess de Nevers.

Coconnas, brave even to rashness, had reflected that at last the candles must be lighted, and thinking the sooner the better, left the hand of the Duchess de Nevers, which he had hitherto held in his own, picked up a taper, and going to the stove, lighted it.

The room was thus again illuminated, and Charles cast an inquiring glance around.

Henry was close to his wife; the Duchess de Nevers was alone in a corner; and Coconnas, standing in the middle of the chamber with his candle in his hand, lighted up the whole scene.

"Excuse us, brother," said Marguerite; "we did not expect you."

"And so your majesty, as you may see, has frightened us not a little," said Henriette.

"For my part," added Henry, who at once comprehended the whole, "I was so startled that I upset the table."

Coconnas gave the King of Navarre a look which implied:

"I like that!—here's a husband who knows what he is about."

"What a complete upset," said Charles. "Harry, your supper is regularly spoiled so come with me, and you shall finish it elsewhere. I mean to carry you off this evening."

"What, sire!" said Henry; "your majesty will do me that honor?"

"Yes, my majesty will do you the honor to take you from the Louvre. Lend him to me, Marguerite, and I will bring him back again to-morrow morning."

"Ah, brother," replied Marguerite, "you have no need of my permission for that; you are master here, as everywhere else."

"Sire," said Henry, "I will just go for another cloak, and return immediately."

"There's no occasion; the one you have on is quite good enough."

"But, sire," began the Béarnais.

"I tell you not to return to your apartments, *mille noms d'un diable!* don't you hear what I say? Come along!"

"Yes—yes, go!" said Marguerite, pressing her husband's arm, for a singular look of Charles's had convinced her that something remarkable was going on.

"I am ready, sire," said Henry.

But Charles was looking very steadfastly at Coconnas, who continued his office of torch-bearer, by lighting the other candles.

"Who is this gentleman?" he inquired of Henry, still gazing on the Piedmontese; "is it M. de la Mole?"

"Who has mentioned M. de la Mole to him?" thought Marguerite.

"No, sire," replied Henry; "M. de la Mole is not here, and I regret it the more, as I cannot have the honor of presenting him to your majesty as well as his friend, M. de Coconnas: they are inseparables, and are both in the suite of M. d'Alençon."

"Ah! ah! of our famous marksman!" said Charles; then frowning, he added, "Is not M. de la Mole a Huguenot?"

"Converted, sire," said Henry; "and I answer for him as for myself."

"When you answer for any one, Harry, after what you have done to-day, I have no right to doubt you. But no matter. I should have liked to see M. de la Mole, but some other time will do;" and then, looking again around the chamber, Charles kissed Marguerite, and took away the King of Navarre, holding him by the arm.

At the gate of the Louvre, Henry stopped to speak to some one.

"Come, come along quickly, Harry," said Charles. "When I tell you the air of the Louvre is not good for you this evening, why the devil don't you believe me?"

"*Ventre-saint-gris!*" murmured Henry, "and De Mouy will be all alone in my room; if the air is not good for me, it must be worse for him."

They crossed the drawbridge, and the king giving a peculiar whistle, four gentlemen who were waiting in the Rue de Beauvais joined them, and they all advanced into the city.

The clock struck ten.

"Well!" said Marguerite, when the King and Henry had gone, "let us sit down again to table."

"No, *ma foi!*" said the duchess; "I am too much frightened. The little house in the Rue Cloche-Percée forever! No one can enter there without laying a regular siege, and our brave friends could use their swords."

Coconnas went to the cabinet.

"Well!" said a voice in the darkness, "what has happened?"

"Eh, *mordi!* we are now at the dessert."

"And the King of Navarre?"

"Has seen nothing."

"And King Charles?"

"Ah! the king has taken off the husband."

"No, really!"

"Yes, and the ladies have a pilgrimage to make towards the Rue du Roi-de-Sicile, and we must guard the pilgrims."

"Impossible! you know that——"

"Why impossible?"

"Why, are we not in the service of his royal highness?"

The two friends represented their position to their fair friends and Madame de Nevers said:

"Well, then, we will go without you."

The two young men made their bows, and proceeded to the Duke d'Alençon, who seemed to be awaiting them.

"You are rather late, gentlemen," was his remark.

"Scarcely ten o'clock, monseigneur," replied Coconnas.

The duke looked at his watch.

"True, but yet everybody in the Louvre is in bed."

"Monseigneur," said Coconnas, "your highness, no doubt, will go to bed, or write——"

"No, gentlemen, I can dispense with your services until to-morrow morning."

The two young men ran up-stairs as speedily as possible, took their cloaks and night-swords, and hastening out of the Louvre, overtook the two ladies at the corner of the Rue du Coq-Saint-Honoré.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MAN PROPOSES, BUT GOD DISPOSES.

As the duke said, everything was silent at the Louvre.

Marguerite and Madame de Nevers had gone to the Rue Cloche-Percée; Coconnas and La Mole had followed them; the king and Henry were roving about in the city; the Duke d'Alençon was anxiously watching the accomplishment of the events his mother had alluded to, and Catherine was in bed, listening to Madame de Sauve, who read to her certain Italian tales, at which the worthy queen laughed heartily.

"Let me know," said Catherine, "if my daughter, the

Queen of Navarre, is in her apartments, and if she is, beg her to come and keep me company."

The page to whom this order was addressed left the room, and soon returned, accompanied by Gillonne.

"I sent for the queen," said Catherine, "not for her attendant."

"Madame," replied Gillonne, "I thought it my duty to come myself, to inform your majesty that the Queen of Navarre is gone out with the Duchess de Nevers."

"Out at this hour!" said Catherine, frowning; "where is she gone?"

"To a meeting of alchemists, at the Hôtel de Guise, in the apartments of Madame de Nevers."

"And when will she return?"

"The meeting will not break up until very late," replied Gillonne, "so that it is probable her majesty will sleep at the Hôtel de Guise."

"She is very happy," murmured Catherine; "she has friends, and is a queen; she wears a crown, and is called your majesty, and she has no subjects."

Gillonne made her curtsey, and left the room.

"Go on, Charlotte," said the queen.

Madame de Sauve obeyed.

In ten minutes Catherine stopped her.

"Oh, by the way," said she, "dismiss the guards in the gallery."

This was the signal agreed upon with Maurevel.

The order was executed, and Madame de Sauve continued.

She had read for a quarter of an hour, when a long and piercing cry was heard, that made the hair of all in the chamber stand on end.

A pistol-shot followed.

"Well," said Catherine, "why do you not go on reading?"

"Madame," replied Charlotte, turning deadly pale; "did not your majesty hear?"

"What?" asked Catherine.

"That cry!"

"And that pistol-shot?" added the captain of the guards.

"A cry and a pistol-shot!" said Catherine, "I heard them not; besides, a cry and a pistol-shot are nothing so very extraordinary at the Louvre. Read on, Carlotta."

"But listen, madame," said Madame de Sauve, whilst M. de Nancey stood grasping his sword-hilt, not daring to leave the apartment without the queen's permission, "I hear struggling, imprecations——"

"Shall I go and see, madame?" asked De Nancey.

"No, sir," returned Catherine. "Who will be here to protect me in case of danger? It is only some drunken Swiss quarreling."

The tranquillity of the queen contrasted so strangely with the alarm of every one else, that Madame de Sauve, timid as she was, fixed her eyes inquiringly on her.

"But, madame," said she, "it is as if they were killing some one."

"Whom do you think they are killing?"

"The King of Navarre, madame; for the noise comes from his apartments."

"The fool!" murmured the queen, whose lips, spite of the control she had over herself, were strangely agitated, for she was muttering a prayer; "the fool! she sees her King of Navarre everywhere."

"*Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!*" said Madame de Sauve, sinking into her chair.

"It is over," said Catherine. "Captain," continued she, addressing M. de Nancey, "I hope that to-morrow you will inquire into this, and punish the culprits severely. Continue, Carlotta."

And Catherine sank back on her pillow in a state that seemed near akin to fainting, for her attendants remarked large drops of perspiration on her face.

Madame de Sauve obeyed, but her eyes and her voice alone were engaged. She fancied she saw him most dear to her, surrounded by deadly perils, and after a mental struggle of some minutes, her voice failed her, the book fell from her hands, and she fainted.

Suddenly a still more violent noise than before was heard, a hasty step shook the corridor, two more pistol-shots made the window-panes shake. Catherine, astonished at this renewal of the strife, rose ; she was deadly pale, her eyes were dilated, and at the moment De Nancey was about to rush from the apartment, she seized his arm, saying :

"Let every one stay here ; I will go myself and see what is the matter."

Thus it was : De Mouy had received that morning, from the hands of Orthon, the key of Henry's chamber ; in the key he remarked a small roll of paper, which he took out and found it to contain the pass-word at the Louvre for the night.

Orthon had, moreover, given him the king's directions to be at the Louvre at ten o'clock.

At half-past nine, De Mouy put on his armor, buttoned a silken doublet on it, buckled over his sword, placed his pistols in his belt, and covered all with the famous cherry mantle.

We have seen how Henry thought fit to pay Marguerite a visit before entering his own apartments, and how he arrived by the secret passage just in time to run against La Mole in Marguerite's chamber, and to take his place in the supper-room. Precisely at this moment, De Mouy passed the wicket of the Louvre, and, thanks to the password and the cherry mantle, entered the palace without obstacle.

He went straight to the King of Navarre's apartments, imitating, as well as he could, La Mole's walk and manner. He found Orthon waiting for him in the antechamber.

"Sire de Mouy," said the mountaineer, "the king has gone out, but he has ordered me to conduct you to his chamber, where you are to wait ; should he not come until late, he desires you will lie down on his bed."

De Mouy entered, without asking further explanation.

In order to fill up the time, De Mouy took pen and paper, and approaching an excellent map of France that hung on the wall, set himself to count the stages from Paris to Pau.

This did not occupy him long, and when he had finished he was at a loss what to do.

He walked up and down the room a few times, yawned, and then, profiting by Henry's invitation, and by the familiarity that then existed between princes and their gentlemen, placed his pistols and the lamp on the table, laid his drawn sword by his side, and secure against surprise, for an attendant was watching in the outer chamber, soon slept soundly.

It was then that six men, sword and dagger in hand, glided noiselessly along the corridor that communicated with Henry's apartments.

One of these men walked in front; besides his sword and dagger, he had pistols attached to his belt by silver hooks. This man was Maurevel. Arrived at Henry's door, he stopped.

"Are you quite sure all the sentinels are gone?" asked he.

"There is not one left," replied his lieutenant.

"Good," said Maurevel; "now let us see whether he we come for is here."

"Poor devil of a king!" said one of the men; "it was written on high he should not escape."

"And here also," said Maurevel, pointing to the order in his girdle.

Maurevel placed the key Catherine had given him in the lock, and leaving two men at the door, passed with the others into the antechamber.

"Ah," said he, hearing, even from that distance, the loud breathing of the sleeper; "it seems we have got him!"

Orthon, thinking it was his master, advanced and found himself in the presence of five armed men. At the sight of their sinister faces, and more particularly at that of Maurevel, he recoiled, and planted himself before the second door.

"Who are you?" said Orthon; "and what do you want?"

"In the king's name," said Maurevel, "where is your master?"

"He is absent."

"'Tis false!" replied Maurevel. "Stand back!"

Orthon seized the handle of the door.

"You shall not enter!" cried he.

At a sign from Maurevel, the four men grasped the faithful page, tore him from his hold, and as he was about to cry out, Maurevel placed his hand on his mouth. Orthon bit the assassin furiously, who uttered a suppressed cry and struck him on the head with the pommel of his sword. Orthon fell, crying, "Treason! treason!"

His voice failed him, and he fainted.

The assassins passed over his body: two stationed themselves at the second door, and the three others, led by Maurevel, entered the bed-chamber.

By the light of the lamp they saw the bed: the curtains were closed. "Oh," said the lieutenant, "he snores no longer!"

"Now, then—upon him!" replied Maurevel.

At this voice, a hoarse cry, more like the roar of a lion than the voice of a human being, was heard, the curtains were violently drawn back, and a man in a cuirass and steel cap appeared sitting on the bed, a pistol in each hand, and his drawn sword on his knees. At this sight, Maurevel's hair stood on end; he turned deadly pale, and recoiled as if he had seen a specter.

Suddenly, the armed figure rose and advanced towards Maurevel, as he retreated, so that it was he who seemed to fly, and De Mouy who seemed to pursue.

"Ah, scoundrel!" said De Mouy; "you are come to murder me, as you murdered my father!"

The two guards who were with Maurevel alone heard these terrible words; but as they were uttered, one of De Mouy's pistols was leveled at Maurevel's head. The ruffian sank on his knees at the instant De Mouy pulled the trigger, and one of the guards, whom he uncovered by this movement, fell with a bullet in his heart; Maurevel instantly fired in return, but the ball glanced off De Mouy's cuirass.

Then, measuring the distance and calculating his spring, De Mouy, with a back stroke of his large sword, cleft the skull of the second guard, and turning to Maurevel, crossed weapons with him.

The combat was terrible, but brief : at the fourth pass, Maurevel felt De Mouy's sword in his throat ; he uttered a low groan, and fell, upsetting the lamp, which was extinguished in the fall.

Agile and powerful as one of Homer's heroes, De Mouy sprang boldly forward, favored by the obscurity, into the antechamber, felled one of the guards to the earth, sent the other staggering from him, passed like lightning between the two at the outer door, escaped two pistol-shots fired at him, the balls of which grazed the corridor, and was then safe, for besides the sword with which he dealt such fearful blows he had a loaded pistol.

He hesitated an instant whether he should enter D'Alençon's apartments, the door of which seemed ajar, or escape from the Louvre : resolving upon the latter course, he sprang down the stairs, arrived at the wicket, pronounced the pass-word, adding : "Go up-stairs ! they are killing on the king's account."

And availing himself of the stupefaction produced by the report of the pistols and his own words, he disappeared in the Rue du Coq, without having received a scratch.

It was at this moment that Catherine stopped M. de Nancey, saying :

"Stay here ; I will go myself and see what is the matter."

Then, taking a lamp, and passing her naked feet into slippers, Catherine advanced, pale as a specter, along the corridor, full of smoke, towards Henry's apartments.

All was silent.

She arrived at the door, entered, and found Orthon senseless on the threshold.

"Oh," said she, "here is the servant ; we shall soon find the master : " and she approached the second door.

There her foot struck against a corpse ; she turned the lamp upon it ; it was the guard whose skull had been cleft : he was quite dead. A little further lay the lieutenant, with the death-rattle in his throat.

Besides the bed was a man who, pale as death, was bleeding fast from a double wound in his throat, and who, clenching his hands convulsively, strove to raise himself.

It was Maurevel.

Catherine shuddered ; she saw the bed deserted ; she eagerly looked around the room, and in vain sought amongst the three corpses for the one she so earnestly desired to behold.

Maurevel knew Catherine, and stretched out his hand towards her with a desperate movement.

"Where is he?" said she. "Have you let him escape?"

Maurevel strove to speak, but a bloody foam covered his lips, and he could only feebly shake his head.

"Speak!" cried the queen ; "speak, if it be but one word!"

Maurevel pointed to his wound, and after a desperate effort to utter something, fainted.

She looked around her . there were none but the dead and the dying there : blood flowed in every direction, and silence reigned in the chamber. She spoke again to Maurevel, but in vain ; a paper was in his girdle—it was the order for Henry's arrest ; Catherine seized it, and concealed it beneath her robe.

At this instant she heard a slight noise behind her, and turning round, she perceived D'Alençon, who had been drawn thither by the noise.

"You here, François?" said she.

"Yes, madame. For God's sake, what does this mean?"

"Retire to your apartments ; you will know soon enough."

D'Alençon, however, was not so ignorant of what had passed as Catherine imagined. Seeing men enter the King of Navarre's apartments, he guessed what was to happen, and was secretly rejoiced at having so dangerous an enemy disposed of by a hand more powerful than his own.

Soon the noise of firearms and the steps of a fugitive attracted his attention, and he saw Red Mantle disappear.

"De Mouy!" cried he; "De Mouy with my brother-in-law, or can it be La Mole?"

He began to feel alarmed.

Wishing to assure himself, he ascended to his apartment; no one was there, but the cherry-colored mantle was hanging against the wall. It was, then, De Mouy. Pale as death, and trembling lest De Mouy had been taken prisoner, and betrayed the secrets of the conspiracy, he rushed to the wicket, where he was informed De Mouy had passed, saying that some one was being killed on the king's account.

"He was mistaken," muttered d'Alençon; "it is on the queen-mother's account."

And returning to the scene of combat, he found Catherine prowling like a hyæna amongst the dead.

Catherine, in despair at the failure of this new attempt, called De Nancey, had the bodies removed, and Maurevel conveyed to his own house, and forbade them to wake the king.

"Oh," murmured she, as she entered her apartment, her head sunk on her bosom; "he has again escaped—the hand of God protects him. He will reign—he will reign!"

Then, as she opened her door, she assumed a smile.

"Oh, madame, what was the matter?' demanded every one except Madame de Sauve, who was too frightened to ask any questions.

"Oh, nothing," replied the queen; "only a noise; nothing more."

"But," cried Madame de Sauve, suddenly, "every step your majesty takes leaves a trace of blood on the carpet!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE TWO KINGS.

Charles IX. walked arm in arm with Henry, followed by his four gentlemen, and preceded by two torch-bearers.

"When I quit the Louvre," said the poor king, "I experience a pleasure like that I feel when I enter a fine forest—I breathe, I live, I am free!"

Henry smiled.

"Your majesty would be happy in my mountains in Béarn, then?" was his reply.

"Yes, and I can understand how desirous you are to return there; but if the desire comes very strong upon you, Harry, added Charles, laughing, "be careful, for my mother Catherine is so very fond of you, that she really cannot do without you."

The two kings, followed by their escort, had reached the Hôtel de Condé, when they observed two men, wrapped in long cloaks, come forth from a private door, which one of them closed carefully.

"Oh, oh!" said the king to Henry, "this deserves our attention. You, Harry, are sure of your wife" (Charles smiled as he said this), "but your cousin De Condé is not so sure of his; or if he is sure, devil fetch me! but he is very wrong."

"But how do you know, sire, that it is Madame de Condé these gentlemen have come to visit?"

"A presentiment. They have seen us, and try to avoid notice; and then the peculiar cut of one of their mantles. *Par Dieu!* it would be strange!"

"What?"

"Nothing, only an idea; but let us advance towards them."

And he went towards the two men, who, thus seeing that they must be accosted, made several steps in a contrary direction.

"Hola! messieurs," said the king; "stop!"

"Do you address us?" said a voice, which made Charles and his companion start.

"Ah, Harry!" said Charles, "do you recognize that voice, now?"

"Sire," replied Henry, "if your brother, the Duke d'Anjou, were not at Rochelle, I should swear it was he who just spoke."

"Well then," said Charles, "he is not at Rochelle."

"But who is with him?"

"A man whose figure can hardly be mistaken. Hola! I say," continued the king, "did you not hear me?"

"Are you the watch, to apprehend us?" asked the taller of the two men, thrusting forth his hand from the folds of his mantle.

"Assume that we are the watch," said the king, "and stand when you are desired."

Then, whispering Henry, he added, "Now you will see the volcano spit forth flames."

"There are eight of you," replied the taller of the two men, showing not only his arm but his face; "but were you a hundred, I bid you keep your distance."

"Ah, ah! the Duke de Guise!" said Henry.

"Ah! our cousin of Lorraine," said the king; "it is you, is it? How fortunate!"

"The king!" exclaimed the duke.

As to the other personage, he wrapped himself up still closer in his mantle, and remained motionless, after having first uncovered his head respectfully.

"Sire," said the Duke de Guise, "I have just been paying a visit to my sister-in-law, Madame de Condé."

"Yes, and have brought one of your gentlemen with you. Pray, who is he?"

"Sire," replied the duke, "your majesty does not know him."

"Then we will make his acquaintance now," said the king; and going towards him, he desired the two men to approach with their flambeaux.

"Pardon, my brother," said the Duke d'Anjou, opening his mantle, and bowing with ill-concealed vexation.

"Ah, ah, Henry! What, is it you? But no, it cannot be possible. I am deceived. My brother of Anjou would never have gone to see any person without first coming to see me. He is not ignorant that for princes of the blood there is only one entrance in Paris, and that is by the gate of the Louvre."

"Pardon me, sire," said the Duke d'Anjou. "I entreat your majesty to forgive this breach of etiquette."

"Of course," replied the king in a jeering tone; "and what were you doing, brother, at the Hôtel de Condé?"

"Why," said the King of Navarre, with his peculiar air, "what your majesty alluded to but just now;" and he laughed loudly.

"And wherefore," asked the Duke de Guise, with hauteur, for, like the rest of the world, he behaved very rudely to the poor King of Navarre, "should I not visit my sister-in-law? Does not the Duke d'Alençon visit his?"

Henry's cheek turned red.

"What sister-in-law?" remarked Charles; "I do not know of any other he has than the Queen Elizabeth."

"Your pardon, sire; it was his sister I should have said—Madame Marguerite, whom we saw as we came hither half-an-hour since, in her litter, accompanied by two sparks, one on each side."

"Really?" said Charles; "what do you say to that, Henry?"

"That the Queen of Navarre is free to go where she pleases; but I doubt her having quitted the Louvre."

"And I am sure of it," said the Duke de Guise.

"And I also," said the Duke d'Anjou; "and the litter stopped in the Rue Cloche-Percée."

"Your sister-in-law, then—not this one, but the other," and he pointed his finger in the direction of the Hôtel de Guise, "must be also of the party, for we left them together, and they are, as you know, inseparables."

"I do not understand what your majesty implies," replied the Duke de Guise.

"Now to me," observed the king, "nothing can be more clear; and that is why there was a spark on each side of the litter."

"Well," said the duke, "if there be any wrong on the part of the queen and of my sister-in-law, let us call on the justice of the king to put an end to it."

"Eh, *par Dieu!*" said Henry, "let us have done with Mesdames de Condé and de Nevers. The king has no uneasiness about his sister; I have none for my wife."

"No, no," interposed Charles; "I will have the affair cleared up; but let us manage it ourselves. The litter, you say, cousin, stopped in the Rue Cloche-Percée?"

"Yes, sire."

"You know the spot?"

"Yes, sire."

"Well, then, let us go thither; and if it be necessary to burn down the house to know who is in it, why, we will do so."

It was with this feeling, very discouraging for those concerned, that the four principal princes of the Christian world proceeded towards the Rue Saint Antoine.

When they reached the Rue Cloche-Percée, Charles, who wished to confine the thing to his family, dismissed his attendants, desiring them to be near the Bastille at six o'clock in the morning, with two horses.

On reaching the house, they knocked, and tried to gain admittance, which the German porter decidedly and doggedly refused. Seeing that they could not succeed so, the Duke de Guise, pretending to go away, went to the corner of the Rue Saint Antoine, and there picked up one of those stones such as Ajax, Telamon, and Diomede upheaved three thousand years before, and dashed it with violence against the door, which flew open with the concussion, knocking down the German, who fell heavily, and with a loud cry, that aroused the garrison, which else ran a great risk of being surprised.

At this noise, La Mole, Coconnas, Marguerite, and

Henriette were aroused. They blew out all the lights instantly, and opening the windows, went out into the balcony, when, seeing four men in the darkness, they began to shower down upon them all the projectiles within reach, and make a noise by striking the stone walls with the flat of their swords. Charles, the most eager of the assailants, received a silver ewer on his shoulder, the Duke d'Anjou a basin containing a jelly of oranges and cinnamon, and the Duke de Guise a haunch of venison.

Henry received nothing; he was quietly speaking to the porter, whom M. de Guise had tied to the door, and who replied by his eternal,

"Ich verstehe nicht."

The women ably backed the besieged army, and handed projectiles to them, which fell like hail.

"By the devil's death!" cried Charles, as he received on his head a stool which knocked his hat over his eyes and on to his nose, "if they do not open this moment, I'll hang them all."

"My brother!" said Marguerite to La Mole, in a low voice.

"The king!" said he to Henriette.

"The king! the king!" said she to Coconnas, who was drawing a large chest to the window, intending it especially for the Duke de Guise, whom, without knowing him, he had picked out as his peculiar antagonist; "the king, I tell you!"

Coconnas let go the chest with an air of amazement.

"The king?" said he.

"Yes, the king!"

"Then sound a retreat."

"Well, be it so. Marguerite and La Mole are off already."

"Which way?"

"Come this way, I tell you!" and taking him by the hand, Henriette led Coconnas by the secret door which led to the adjoining house, and having closed it after them, they all four fled by the way that led to the Rue Tizon.

"Ah, ah!" said Charles, "I think the garrison surrenders. Cousin," he continued, "take up the stone again, and serve the inner door as you have done the outer."

The duke burst the other door in with his foot.

"The torches! the torches!" said the king, and the lackeys having relighted them, came forward, and the king taking one, handed the other to the Duke d'Anjou.

The Duke de Guise went first, sword in hand; Henry brought up the rear.

They reached the first story, and in the dining-room found the relics of supper, with candelabra upset, furniture thrown over, and all that was not of metal destroyed.

They went into the saloon, but there was no better clue to the late truants there than in the other room.

"There must be another way of egress," observed the king.

"Most probably," replied D'Anjou.

They searched on all sides, but found no door.

"Where is the porter?" inquired the king.

"I fastened him to the door," replied the Duke de Guise.

Henry looked out of the window, and observed:

"He is there no longer."

"Devil's death!" said the king, "we shall learn nothing now."

"And really," added Henry, "you see plainly, sire, that nothing proves that my wife and the Duke de Guise's sister-in-law have been in this house; and thus the best thing we can do——"

"Is," said Charles, "for me to foment my bruise, D'Anjou, to wipe away the marks of the orange-jam, and Guise to rub the grease from off his ruff."

And then they all went away, without so much as closing the door after them.

When they reached the Rue Saint Antoine, the king said to M. d'Anjou and the Duke de Guise:

"Which way are you going, gentlemen?"

"Sire, we are going to Nantouillet's, who expects my cousin of Lorraine and myself to supper. Will your majesty deign to accompany us?"

"No, I thank you; our way lies in an opposite direction. Will you have one of my torch-bearers?"

"No, I thank you, sire," was D'Anjou's reply.

"Good! He is afraid I should watch him," whispered Charles in Henry's ear. Then, taking him by the arm, he said:

"Come, Harry, I will find you a supper to-night."

"Then we are not going back to the Louvre?" was Henry's response.

"No, I tell you, you threefold thickhead! Come with me when I tell you—come, come!"

And he conducted Henry by the Rue Geoffroy-Lasnier.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MARIE TOUCHET.

THEY reached the Rue de la Mortellerie, and stopped before a small lone house in the middle of a garden, inclosed by high walls. Charles took a key from his pocket, and opened the door; and then desiring Henry and the torch-bearer to enter, he closed the door after him. One small window only was lighted, to which Charles, with a smile, pointed Henry's attention, saying:

"Harry, I told you, that when I left the Louvre I quitted hell, and when I come here I enter paradise."

"And who is the angel that guards the entrance to your Eden, sire?"

"You will see," replied Charles IX.; and making a sign to Henry to follow him without noise, he pushed open a first door then a second, and paused on the threshold.

"Look!" he said.

Henry did so, and remained with his eyes fixed on as charming a picture as he ever saw. It was a female of eighteen or nineteen years of age, reposing at the foot of a bed, on which was a sleeping infant, whose two feet she held in her hands, pressing them to her lips, whilst her long chestnut hair fell down over them like waves of gold.

It was a picture of Albano's representing the Virgin and the infant Jesus.

"Oh, sire," said, the King of Navarre, "who is this charming creature?"

"The angel of my paradise, Harry; the only being who loves me for myself."

Henry smiled.

"Yes," said Charles, "for myself; "for she loved me before she knew I was the king."

"Well, and since——"

"Well, and since," said Charles, with a sigh, which proved that this glittering royalty was sometimes a burden to him; "since she knew it, she still loves me. Watch!"

The king approached her gently, and on the lovely cheek of the young female impressed a kiss as light as that of the bee on a lily, yet it awoke her.

"Charles!" she murmured, opening her eyes.

"You see," said the king, "she calls me Charles: the queen says sire."

"Oh," exclaimed the young girl, "you are not alone!"

"No, dearest Marie, I have brought you another king, happier than myself, for he has no crown: more unhappy than me, for he has no Marie Touchet."

"Sire, it is, then, the King of Navarre?"

"It is, love."

Henry went towards her, and Charles took his right hand.

"Look at this hand, Marie," said he: "it is the hand of a good brother and a loyal friend; and but for this hand——"

"Well, sire!"

"But for this hand, this day, Marie, our boy had been fatherless."

Marie uttered a cry, seized Henry's hand, and kissed it.

The king went to the bed where the child was still asleep.

"Eh!" said he, "if this stout boy slept in the Louvre, instead of sleeping in this small house, he would change the aspect of things at present, and perhaps for future." *

"Sire," said Marie, "without offense to your majesty, I prefer his sleeping here, he sleeps better."

"You are right, Marie," said Charles IX. "Let us sup now."

The two men passed into the dining-room, whilst the anxious and careful mother covered the little Charles, who slept soundly, with a warm wrapper, and then joined the two kings, between whom she seated herself, and helped both.

"Is it not well, Harry," asked Charles, "to have a place in the world in which we can eat and drink without the necessity of any one tasting your viands before you eat them yourself?"

"I believe, sire," was Henry's rejoinder, "that I can appreciate that better than any one."

"Marie," said the king, "I present to you one of the most intelligent and witty men I know; it is much to say, even at court, and, perhaps, I have understood him better than any one; for I speak of his mind, as well as of his heart."

"Sire," said Henry, "I hope that in exaggerating the one you have no doubt of the other."

"I do not exaggerate anything, Harry," replied the king. "He is, for one thing, a capital master of anagrams. Bid him make one on your name, and I will answer for it he will."

"Oh, what can you find in the name of a poor girl like me? What pleasing idea could such a name as Marie Touchet produce?"

"Sire," said Henry, "it is too easy; there is no merit in finding such an one."

"What! done already?" said Charles. "You see——"

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* This natural child was afterwards the famous Duke d'Angoulême, who died in 1650; and had he been legitimate, would have taken precedence of Henry III., Henry IV., Louis XIII., Louis XIV., etc., and altered the whole line of the royal succession of France.

Henry took his tablets from the pocket of his doublet, tore out a page of the paper, and beneath the name "Marie Touchet," he wrote "Je charme tout" ("I charm all"), and then handed the leaf to the young girl.

"Really," she exclaimed, "it is impossible!"

"What has he found?" inquired Charles.

"Sire, I dare not repeat it."

"Sire," said Henry, "in the name of Marie Touchet there is letter for letter, only changing the I into J, which is customary, the words, 'Je charme tout.'"

"So it does," cried Charles, "exactly—beautifully! This shall be your device, Marie, and never was device better merited. Thanks, Harry! Marie, I will give it to you set in diamonds."

The supper finished as it struck two o'clock by Nôtre-Dame.

"Now, Marie" said Charles, "in recompense for the compliment, give him an armchair, in which he may sleep till daybreak—a long way off from us though, for he snores fearfully. If, Harry, you wake before me, rouse me, for we must be at the Bastille by six o'clock. Good-night—make yourself as comfortable as you can. But," added the king, placing his hand on Henry's shoulder, "on your life, Harry, on your life, do not leave this house without me."

Henry had suspected too much, to feel any desire of despising this caution.

Charles IX. went to his chamber, and Henry, the hardy mountaineer, soon made himself quite comfortable in his armchair, and speedily justified the precaution his brother-in-law had taken in keeping him at a distance. In the morning, Charles aroused him, and as he was dressed, his toilette did not occupy him very long.

They both passed through the bedchamber, where the young girl was sleeping in her bed, and the baby in its cradle. They both were smiling as they slept. Charles looked at them very tenderly, and turning to the King of Navarre, said to him:

"Harry, if you should ever learn what service I have this night rendered you, and any misfortune should happen to me, remember this child which rests here in its cradle." Then, kissing them both, he said, "Adieu, my angels!" and left the apartment. Henry followed, buried deeply in thought.

Two horses, held by his gentlemen, awaited them at the Bastille; Charles made a sign to Henry to mount, and going by the garden of the Arbalète, they went towards the exterior Boulevards. When they reached the Marais, where they were sheltered by the palisades, Charles directed Henry's attention, through the thick haze of the morning, to some men wrapped in long mantles and wearing fur caps, who were on horseback beside a wagon heavily laden.

"Ah, ah!" said Charles, smiling, "I thought so."

"Eh, sire," observed Henry, "is not one of them the Duke d' Anjou!"

"Himself," said Charles. "Keep back, Harry! don't let them see us."

"And who are the other men, and what is in the wagon?"

"The men are the Polish ambassadors, and in the wagon is a crown; and now," he added, putting his horse to a gallop, "come, Harry, for I have seen all I wished to discover."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE RETURN TO THE LOUVRE.

WHEN Catherine believed all was arranged in the King of Navarre's chamber, that the dead soldiers were removed, Maurevel conveyed away, and the carpets washed, she dismissed her maids, for it was nearly midnight, and attempted to go to sleep; but the shock had been too severe, the deception too great. The detested Henry eternally escaped her plots, well-laid and deadly as they were; he seemed protected by some invisible power, which Catherine persisted in calling chance, although in the depths of her heart a voice told her that the real name of this power was destiny. Sleep came not to her eyes, and, her brain filled with fresh projects, she rose at break of day, dressed herself, and went towards Charles's apartments, where she found his nurse in the antechamber.

"Nurse, I desire to see my son."

"Madame, I will not open the door, except on the formal order of your majesty."

"Open, nurse, I command you."

The nurse at this voice, more respected and more dreaded than that of Charles himself, presented the key to Catherine; but Catherine had no need of it, drawing from her pocket a key of her own, which opened her son's door in an instant.

The chamber was unoccupied; Charles's couch was undisturbed; and his two greyhounds, lying down on a bearskin, rose, and coming to Catherine, licked her hands.

"Ah!" said the queen, "he has gone out; I will await him."

And she seated herself gloomily in the recess of a window which looked into the principal court of the Louvre. For two hours she remained there, pale and immovable as a marble statue, when at length she saw a troop of cavaliers enter the gate, at the head of whom she beheld Charles and Henry of Navarre.

Then she comprehended all. Charles, instead of debating with her as to the arrest of his brother-in-law, had carried him off, and thus saved him.

"Blind, blind, blind!" she murmured; and she waited where she was.

A moment afterwards she heard footsteps without, and Charles, lifting the tapestry, found himself in the presence of his mother.

Behind him, and looking over his shoulder, was the pale and uneasy countenance of the Béarnais.

"Ah! you here, madame?" said Charles IX., frowning.

"Yes, my son; I wish to speak with you."

"To me?"

"You, and alone."

"Well, well," said Charles, turning towards his brother-in-law, "since it cannot be avoided, the sooner the better."

"I leave you, sire," said Henry.

"Yes, yes, do," replied Charles; "and since you are a Catholic, Harry, go and hear mass on my behalf; as for me, I shall stay and hear the sermon."

Henry bowed, and left the apartment.

Charles IX. anticipating the questions which his mother would address to him, said, trying to turn the affair into a jest. "Well, madame, *pardieu!* you are going to scold me, are you not? I made your little plot fail most signally. Well, *mort d'un diable!* I really could not allow to be arrested and conveyed to the Bastille the man who had just saved my life; so forgive me, and confess that the joke was a capital one."

"Sire,' replied Catherine, "your majesty is mistaken; it was not a joke."

"Yes, yes, and so you will say, or the devil take me!"

"Sire, you have by your own fault caused the failure of a plan which would have led us to a grand discovery."

"Come," said the king, "come, let us know all about it. What have you to complain of against Harry?"

"Why, that he is in a conspiracy."

"Yes, of course; that is your everlasting accusation."

"Listen," said Catherine, "listen, and you will find a means of proving whether or no I am wrong."

"Well, how, mother?"

"Inquire from Henry who was in his chamber last night; and if he tells you, I am ready to confess that I was wrong."

"But suppose it was a woman, we cannot suppose——"

"A woman?"

"Yes, a woman."

"A woman who killed two of your guards, and has wounded, perhaps mortally, M. de Maurevel!"

"Ah, ah!" said the king, "this grows serious. There has been blood spilt, then?"

"Three men were leveled with the earth."

"And he who left them in this condition——?"

"Escaped, safe and sound."

"By Gog and Magog!" cried Charles, "he was a gallant fellow, and you are right, mother. I should like to know him."

"Well, I tell you beforehand you will not learn who it is, at least from Henry."

"But from you, mother. This man did not flee without leaving some traces,—without some portion of his dress being remarked."

"Nothing was observed but the elegant cherry-colored mantle which he wore."

"Ah, ah! a cherry-colored mantle!" said Charles; "I know but one at court so remarkable."

"Precisely," said Catherine.

"Well!" replied Charles.

"Well," answered Catherine, "await me here, my son, whilst I go to see if my orders have been executed."

Catherine went out, leaving Charles alone, and he paced up and down thoughtfully, whistling a hunting air, with one hand in his doublet, and letting the other hang down for his dogs to lick every time he paused.

As to Henry, he had left his brother-in-law's apartments very uneasy, and instead of going along the usual corridor, he had ascended the small private staircase we have before referred to, and which led to the second story, but scarcely had he gone up four steps than he saw a shadow: he stopped, and put his hand to his dagger, but immediately recognized a female, and a charming voice familiar to his ear said:

"Heaven be praised, sire! you are safe and sound. I was in great alarm about you, but heaven has heard my prayer."

"What, then, has happened?" inquired Henry.

"You will know when you reach your apartments. Do not be uneasy about Orthon; I have taken care of him."

And the young lady descended the stairs rapidly, passing Henry as if she had met him accidentally.

"This is very strange," said Henry to himself; "what can have happened?—what has occurred to Orthon?"

The question, unfortunately, could not reach Madame de Sauve, for Madame de Sauve was already out of hearing.

At the top of the staircase Henry saw another shadow; it was that of a man.

"Hush!" said this man.

"Ah, ah! is that you, François?"

"Do not mention my name."

"What has happened?"

"Go into your rooms, and you will see; then go quietly into the corridor, look carefully about that no one sees you, and come to me—my door will be ajar."

And he disappeared, in his turn, down the staircase, like a ghost in a theater down a trap.

"*Ventre-saint-gris!*" muttered de Béarnais, "the mystery grows thicker, but as the solution is to be found in my apartment, let us go thither."

He reached the door, and listened; there was not a sound. Charlotte had told him to go there, and it was thus evident that there was nothing to fear. He entered, and cast a glance around the antechamber, which was solitary, but nothing indicated that anything had taken place.

"Orthon is not here," he remarked, and went to the inner chamber.

Here all was explained. In spite of the water, which had been copiously used, large red spots stained the floor; a piece of furniture was broken, the hangings of the bed were hacked with sword-cuts, a Venetian mirror was broken by the blow of a bullet, and a blood-stained hand had leaned against the wall, and left against it a terrible imprint, announcing that this chamber had been the mute witness of a mortal struggle. Henry started back, and gazed with haggard eye at all these different details, and passing his hand over his brow, moist with perspiration, he murmured:

"Ah! now I understand the service which the king has done me; they came to assassinate me, and—ah!—De Mouy! what have they done with De Mouy?—Wretches! they have murdered him!"

And anxious to learn the particulars, he hastened to the Duke d'Alençon, who was waiting for him, and taking Henry's hand, and placing his finger on his lips, led him to a small closet in the tower, completely isolated, and consequently out of the reach of all eyes and ears.

"Oh, my brother," he said, "what a horrible night!"

"What has happened? asked Henry.

"They sought to arrest you."

"Me?"

"Yes, you."

"And wherefore?"

"I know not—where were you?"

"The king took me last night away with him into the city."

"Then he was aware of it," said D'Alençon. "But since you were not here, who was in your rooms?"

"Was any one there?" inquired Henry, as if ignorant of the fact.

"Yes, a man. When I heard the noise, I ran to bring you succor, but it was too late."

"Was the man arrested?" inquired Henry, anxiously.

"No; he escaped, after having dangerously wounded Maurevel and killed two guards."

"Ah, brave De Mouy!" cried Henry.

"Was it, then, De Mouy?" said D'Alençon, quickly.

Henry saw he had commited a fault.

"At least, I presume so," he replied, "for I had given him an appointment to arrange with him as to your flight, and to tell him that I had ceded to you all my rights to the throne of Navarre."

"Then if De Mouy is known," said D'Alençon, turning pale, "we are lost."

Yes; for Maurevel will tell."

"Maurevel has been wounded in the throat, and I have learned from the surgeon that he will not speak a word for eight days."

"Eight days! that is a longer time than De Mouy requires to reach a place of safety."

"But it may be some other, and not M. de Mouy."

"Do you think so ?" asked Henry.

"Yes ; this person disappeared very swiftly, and nothing was seen but a cherry-colored cloak."

"Why, really," remarked Henry, "a cherry-colored cloak is a thing for a fop, not for a soldier ; no one would suspect De Mouy of appearing in a cherry-colored cloak."

"No ; and if any one were suspected," said D'Alençon, "it would rather be——"

He paused.

"M. de la Mole," said Henry.

"Certainly ; since I, who saw him myself, doubted for a moment."

"You doubted? Well, then, it might be M. de la Mole."

"Does he know nothing ?" inquired D'Alençon.

"Nothing important."

"Brother," said the duke, "now I really believe it was he."

"*Diable !*" observed Henry, "if it be he, it will greatly annoy the queen, who takes an interest in him."

"An interest, say you ?" said D'Alençon, amazed.

"Unquestionably. Do you not remember, François, that it was your sister who recommended him to you ?"

"It was, indeed," said the duke ; "and if I were sure you would support me, I myself would almost accuse him."

"If you accuse him," replied Henry, "understand, brother, I shall not gainsay you."

"But the queen ?" said D'Alençon.

"Ah, yes, the queen !"

"We must know what she will do."

"I will undertake that commission."

"Plague take it, brother ! she will be wrong to give us the lie, for only see what a glorious reputation the young fellow will have, and which will have cost him nothing ; though to be sure, he may be called on to pay capital and interest at once."

"Devil take it ! what would you have ?" inquired Henry. "In this nether world, we have nothing for nothing;" and, saluting D'Alençon, he went rapidly down the staircase to Marguerite's apartments.

The Queen of Navarre was hardly more at ease than her husband. The expedition of the night, directed against herself and Madame de Nevers, by the king, the Duke d'Anjou, the Duke de Guise, and Henry, whom she had recognized, had greatly disturbed her. She had gone to bed, but she could not sleep, and trembled at every sound. At this moment, Henry knocked at her door, and Gillonne admitted him at her mistress's order.

Henry paused at the door. Nothing in him announced the injured husband ; his habitual smile was on his well-defined lips, and not a muscle of his countenance betrayed the severe emotions he had undergone. He looked at Marguerite to ascertain if she would allow him to remain alone with her, and Marguerite motioned Gillonne to retire.

"Madame," said Henry, "I know how deeply you are attached to your friends, and I fear I bring you unwelcome tidings."

"What are they, sir ?" asked Marguerite.

"One of our best beloved servitors is greatly compromised at this moment."

"Who ?"

"Our dear Comte de la Mole."

"And how ?"

"In consequence of the adventure of last night."

Marguerite, in spite of her self-command, could not refrain from blushing.

"What adventure ?" she said.

"What !" said Henry ; "did you not hear all the noise that was made at the Louvre last night ?"

"No, sir."

"Then I congratulate you, madame," said Henry, with much gravity, "for you must have slept very soundly."

"Well, what did pass ?"

"Why, our good mother had ordered M. de Maurevel and six of her guards to arrest me."

"You, sir—you ?"

"Yes, me."

"And wherefore ?"

"Ah! who can tell the 'wherefores' of such a mind as your mother's? I suspect them, but do not know them."

"And you were not in your chamber?"

"No, by accident; you have guessed rightly, madame. Last evening, the king invited me to accompany him. But if I was not in my apartments, some other person was."

"And who was that other person?"

"It appears that it was the Comte de la Mole."

"The Comte de la Mole!" said Marguerite, amazed.

"*Tudieu!* only imagine what a stout fellow the Provençal was," continued Henry. "Why, he wounded Maurevel and killed two of the guards."

"Wounded M. de Maurevel and killed two of the guards! Impossible!"

"What, do you doubt his courage, madame?"

"No; but I say that M. de la Mole could not be in your apartments."

"Why not?"

"Because—because," answered Marguerite, greatly embarrassed, "because he was elsewhere."

"Ah, if he can prove an *alibi*," observed Henry, "that is another thing. He will say where he was, and there's an end."

"Where he was?" said Marguerite, quickly.

"Assuredly. But unfortunately, as they have proofs——"

"Proofs! What?"

"Why, the man who made this desperate defense wore a red cloak."

"But is M. de la Mole the only man who wears a red cloak? I know another person also."

"So do I; but then see what will happen. If it was not M. de la Mole, it was some other man in a red cloak like him, and you know who that man is.'

"Heavens!"

"This is the breaker a head of us. You have seen him, as I have, madame; and your emotion proves it. Let us, then, talk this matter over like two persons who speak of a thing the most coveted in the world—a throne; of a thing most precious—life. De Mouy arrested, we are lost!"

"Yes; I understand that."

"Whilst M. de la Mole can compromise nobody, unless he were capable of inventing some such tale as that he was with a party of ladies—how can I tell?"

"Sir," said Marguerite, "if you only fear that, be perfectly easy; he will not so say."

"What!" said Henry, "will he be silent, even if silence cost him his life?"

"He will, sir."

"You are sure?"

"I will answer for him."

"Then all is for the best," said Henry, rising.

"Then you go, sir——"

"To endeavor to get us out of the danger into which this devil of a man in the red cloak has plunged us."

"Ah, *mon Dieu! mon Dieu!* poor young man!" exclaimed Marguerite, in a paroxysm of grief, and wringing her hands.

"Really," said Henry, as he retired, "this dear M. de la Mole is a very faithful and gentlemanly servitor!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

INTERROGATORIES.

CHARLES entered smiling and jesting into his apartments, but after ten minutes' conversation with his mother, it was she who had recovered her good humor, and he who was serious and thoughtful.

"M. de la Mole," said Charles, "M de la Mole—we must summon Henry and D'Alençon: Henry, because this young man is a Huguenot—D'Alençon, because he is in his service."

"Summon them if you will, my son, you will learn nothing. I fear there exists a better understanding between Henry and François than you imagine."

Charles walked up and down rapidly, biting his lips and pressing his hand to his heart, as if to restrain his wrath.

"No, no," said he, "I will not wait! Let some one summon the Duke d'Alençon, then Henry. I will interrogate them separately. As for you, you can stay, if you please."

The Duke d'Alençon entered. His conversation with Henry had prepared him for this interview; he was therefore perfectly collected.

His answers were most precise. Warned by his mother not to quit his apartments, he was ignorant of the events of the night: only, as those apartments were in the same corridor as the King of Navarre's, he had heard footsteps, then the sound of a door opening, and the report of firearms; he had ventured to open his door slightly, and had seen a man in a red mantle escape. Charles and the queen looked at each other.

"In a red mantle?" said the king.——"Yes."

"And did not this mantle give you any suspicions as to who the person was?"

D'Alençon collected all his presence of mind, in order to lie more naturally.

"I confess," said he, "I thought I recognized the mantle of one of my gentlemen."

"Which of them?"

"M. de la Mole."

"Why was he not in attendance on you?"

"I had given him leave of absence."

"That will do: go."

The duke advanced towards the door.

"No—this way," said Charles, pointing to the door which led to his nurse's apartments.

Charles did not wish François and Henry should see each other. He was ignorant that they had already met for a few moments, and that this short time had sufficed to arrange their plans.

Behind D'Alençon, and at a sign from Charles, came Henry.

"Sire," said he, "you have done well to send for me, for I was coming to seek you, to demand justice."

Charles frowned.

"Yes, justice!" said Henry. "I commence by thanking your majesty for having taken me with you last night, for I now know that by so doing you saved my life; but what have I done to deserve being assassinated?"

"It was not an assassination," said Catherine; "it was an arrest."

"Well!" returned Henry, "what crime have I committed? I am as guilty to-day as yesterday. What is my crime, I ask again, sire?"

Charles looked at his mother, somewhat embarrassed for an answer.

"My son," said Catherine, "you hold communication with suspected persons."

"And these suspected persons compromise me—is it not so, madame?"

"Yes, Henry."

"Name them, then—name them—confront me with them!"

"Why, aye," said Charles, "Harry has a right to an explanation."

"And I demand one," said Henry, who saw his advantage, and resolved to use it: "I demand one from my brother Charles, from my stepmother Catherine. Since my marriage, have I not been a good husband?—ask Marguerite. A good Catholic?—ask my confessor. A good brother?—ask all those who were at the hunt yesterday."

"It is true, Harry," replied the king; "but they say you conspire."

"Against whom?"

"Against me."

"Sire, were that true, I needed only to have let events take their course when the boar was on you."

"Eh, *mort diable!* he is right, mother."

"But who was last night in your apartments?"

"Madame," returned Henry, "I can scarcely answer for myself, much less for others. I left my apartments at a quarter past seven, and the king took me with him at nine; and I did not quit his majesty all the night; I could not be with him and in the Louvre at the same time."

"But," said Catherine, "it is not the less true that some one of your followers killed two of the king's guards, and wounded M. de Maurevel."

"One of my followers!" cried Henry. "Name him, then."

"Every one accuses M. de la Mole."

"M. de la Mole is not in my service, but in that of the Duke d'Alençon, to whom Marguerite recommended him."

"But," said Charles, "was it M. de la Mole who was there?"

"How should I know, sire? I do not say yes or no. M. de la Mole is a very gallant gentleman, devoted to the Queen of Navarre, and who often brings me messages from Marguerite, to whom he i very grateful for having recommended him to the Duke d'Alençon, or from the duke himself. I know not if it were he or not."

"It was he," said Catherine; "he was recognized by his red mantle."

"Ah, he has a red mantle?" asked Henry.

"Yes."

"And the man who so maltreated your guards and M. de Maurevel had a red mantle?"

"Exactly so," replied Charles.

"I have nothing to say to that," answered the Béarnais; "but it seems to me that, instead of sending for me, it was M. de la Mole who should have been sent for; but there is one thing I would remark."

"What is that?"

"That if I had resisted the king's order I should be culpable, and merit severe punishment; but it was not me, it was a stranger in no way concerned, whom they sought to arrest; he defended himself, and he had a right to do so."

"Yet——" murmured Catherine.

"Madame," demanded Henry, "was the order to arrest me?"

"Yes; and the king had signed it."

"But was it in the order to arrest any one found in my place?"

"No."

"Well, then," continued Henry, "unless it can be proved I am plotting against the king, and that the man in my chamber is plotting with me, he is innocent. Sire," continued he, turning to Charles IX., "I do not quit the Louvre, or I am ready at your majesty's orders to retire to any state prison you may think fit to indicate, but for the mean time I have a right to declare myself the loyal subject and brother of your majesty."

And saluting them with an air of dignity Charles had never before seen in him, Henry withdrew.

"Bravo, Harry!" cried Charles.

"Bravo! because he has beaten us?"

"And why not? When he hits me in fencing, don't I cry bravo! Mother, you are wrong to despise this young man.

"My son! I do not hate— I fear him."

"Well, you're wrong; for if he were really plotting against me, he only need have let the boar alone yesterday.'

' Yes," said Catherine, "and so have made D'Anjou, his personal enemy, King of France."

"Never mind what motive made him save my life; suffice it, he did save it. *Mort de tous les diables!* I will not have him meddled with; as for M. de la Mole, I will speak to D'Alençon about him."

Catherine took her leave. On re-entering her chamber, she found Marguerite waiting for her.

"Ah, ah!" said she "it is you, my daughter; I sent for you last night."

"This morning, madame, I come to tell your majesty you are about to commit a great injustice; you are going to arrest M. de la Mole."

"It is probable."

"Accused of having killed two of the king's guards, and wounded M. de Maurevel last night, in the King of Navarre's chamber."

"That is what he is charged with."

"He is wrongfully accused; M. de la Mole is not guilty."

"Not guilty!" cried Catherine, joyfully; for she hoped to learn something from what Marguerite was about to tell her.

"No," returned Marguerite, "he cannot be guilty, for he was not there."

"Where was he, then?"

"With me."

"With you?"

"Yes."

Catherine, instead of darting a look of indignation at her daughter, quietly folded her hands in her lap.

"If not M. de la Mole, who was there, then?" said she.

"I know not," returned Marguerite, hesitatingly.

"Come, do not tell me the truth by halves."

"I tell you, madame, I do not know," said Marguerite, turning pale in spite of herself.

"Well, well," said the queen-mother, "we shall find out. Go, my child; your mother watches over your honor."

Marguerite retired.

"Ah!" murmured Catherine, "Henry and Marguerite have an understanding together; provided she is silent, he is blind. Ah, my children, you think yourselves strong in your union, but I will crush you. Besides, all must be known, the day when Maurevel can write or pronounce six letters."

And hereupon Catherine returned to the royal apartments, where she found Charles in conference with D'Alençon.

"You here, *ma mère!*" said Charles.

"Why not say *again*, for that was in your thoughts?"

"I keep my thoughts to myself," returned the king, with that harsh tone he sometimes adopted even to Catherine. "What have you to say?"

"That you were right, Charles; and you, D'Alençon, wrong."

"How?" cried both together.

"It was not La Mole who was in the King of Navarre's apartments."

"Who then?" asked Charles.

"We shall know when Maurevel is recovered, but let us speak of La Mole."

"What do you want with him, since he was not with the King of Navarre?"

"No, but he was with the queen."

"The queen!" cried Charles, bursting into a loud laugh. "No, no, Guise told us he met her litter."

"Just so," said Catherine; "she has a house in Paris."

"Rue Cloche-Percée?"

"Yes, I believe so."

"Ah!" cried the king, suddenly, "it must have been he who threw a dish on my head last night—the scoundrel!"

"Doubtless," replied Catherine; "and we must take heed to the matter at once, for the least indiscretion of this gentleman might occasion a terrible noise. It needs but a moment of intoxication——"

"Or of vanity," said François.

"Doubtless," returned Charles; "but we cannot carry the cause before the judges, until Henry consents."

"My son," said Catherine, significantly, "a crime has been committed, and there may be scandal. Were you simple gentlemen, I should need say nothing to you, for you are both brave; but you are princes, and cannot cross swords with an inferior in rank; think, then, how to avenge yourselves as princes."

"*Mort de tous les diables!*" said Charles; "I will think of it."

"I leave you," said Catherine, "but I leave you this to represent me."

As she spoke, she untied the silken cord that passed thrice round her waist, and of which the two tassels fell to her knees, and cast it at the feet of the two princes.

"Ah," said Charles, "I understand."

"This cord——" said D'Alençon.

"Is punishment and silence," replied Catherine; "but, first, it will be as well to mention the thing to Henry."

And she retired.

"*Pardieu!*" replied D'Alençon, "a good suggestion. I will send for Henry."

"No," said Charles, "I will see him myself; do you inform D'Anjou and Guise."

And quitting his apartments, he ascended the private staircase which led to Henry's chamber.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

PROJECTS OF VENGEANCE.

Henry had profited by the moment's respite from the examination he had undergone, to fly to Madame de Sauve's. There he found Orthon quite recovered, but the latter could tell him nothing, except that some armed men had entered the apartment, and that one of them had struck him with the hilt of his sword.

As for Orthon, no one had taken any heed to him: Catherine had seen him senseless, and believed he was dead. On coming to himself, in the interval between her departure and the arrival of the captain of the guard, he had taken refuge with Madame de Sauve.

Henry besought Charlotte to let the young man remain with her until he heard from De Mouy, who would certainly write to him. He would then despatch Orthon to him, and instead of one, have two men, on whom to rely in any emergency. This plan formed, he had returned to his apartment, and was musing deeply, when the door opened, and Charles entered.

"Your majesty!" cried Henry.

"I myself. Harry, you are an excellent fellow, and I love you more and more."

"Sire," said Henry, "you overwhelm me."

"You have but one fault."

"If your majesty will explain yourself, I will seek to correct it," said Henry, who saw by the king's face he was in an excellent humor.

"It is, that having good eyes you do not use them."

"Bah!" said Henry; "am I, then, near-sighted without knowing it?"

"Worse than that, you are blind."

"If that be so, will your majesty aid me to recover my sight?"

"When Guise told you last night he saw your wife pass with a gallant, you would not believe it."

"Sire, how could I believe your majesty's sister would commit such an indiscretion?"

"When he told you your wife had gone to the Rue Cloche-Percée, you would not believe that."

"I could not suppose a princess of the royal blood would thus publicly risk her reputation."

"When we besieged the house, and I received a silver dish on my shoulder, D'Anjou a plate of orange jam on his head, and Guise a haunch of venison in his face, did you not see two men and two women?"

"I saw nothing"

"Eh, *corbœuf!* I did, then."

"Ah, if your majesty saw anything, that makes it another thing."

"That is, I saw two men and two women; one of the women, I am sure, was Margot, and one of the men La Mole."

"But," said Henry, "if M. de la Mole was in the Rue Cloche-Percée, he could not be here."

"No, no, he was not here; but never mind that, we shall know who was here when that blockhead Maurevel can write or speak. The question is touching Margot, who deceives you, and her lover, whom we are going to strangle."

Henry started, and looked with an air of bewilderment at the king.

"You won't be sorry for that, I know, Harry. Margot will cry like a thousand Niobes, but I won't have you made a fool of. Let D'Anjou deceive Condé, I do not care; Condé is my enemy—but you are my brother, my friend."

"But, sire——"

"I will not have you molested; you are deceived, but you shall have such a reparation, that to-morrow every one shall say '*Mille noms d'un diable!* The king loves his brother Harry, for he twisted M. de la Mole's neck finely for his sake last night.'"

"Are you quite resolved, sire?" asked Henry.

"Quite; we are going on an expedition against the rascal; myself, D'Anjou, D'Alençon, and Guise. A king, two princes of the blood, and a sovereign prince, without reckoning yourself."

"How! without reckoning me?"

"Of course you will be with us."

"But, sire, do you know for certain——?"

"Why, the rascal boasts of it. He goes sometimes to see her at the Louvre, sometimes at the Rue Cloche-Percée: take a dagger with you."

"Sire," said Henry, "upon reflection, your majesty will comprehend that I cannot take part in this expedition. I am too much interested in it, not to have my presence ascribed to a desire of vengeance. Your majesty punishes a man who calumniates your sister; and Marguerite, whom I maintain innocent, is not dishonored; but if I am associated with it, my co-operation converts an act of justice into a murder,—my wife is no longer calumniated, she is guilty."

"*Mordieu,* Harry! as I told my mother just now, you have the quickest wit of all of us."

And Charles regarded his brother-in-law complacently. Henry bowed in acknowledgment of the compliment.

"Well, well, leave all to me. It shall not be the worse executed."

"I leave it all in your hands."

"At what time does he usually go to your wife's apartments?"

"About nine o'clock."

"And at what hour does he leave?"

"Before I come, for I never see him."

"What time is that?"

"About eleven."

"Good; come down this evening at midnight, all will be over."

And Charles, after shaking Henry's hand, and renewing his protestations of friendship, left the apartment, whistling a favorite hunting air.

Henry laughed as he could laugh when no one was there to hear him.

"*Ventre-saint-gris!*" said he, "I will wager anything the queen-mother is at the bottom of all this. She does nothing but try to get up quarrels between my wife and me."

At seven o'clock the same evening, a young man who had just left the bath, perfumed and attired himself, humming a gay air the while. Beside him slept, or rather reclined on the bed, another young man.

The one was La Mole, the other Coconnas.

"Where are you going to-night?" asked the latter.

"Where am I going?" said La Mole. "I am going to the queen."

"Ah, true! I forgot. Here is your mantle."

"No, that is the black; I want the cherry one; the queen prefers me in that."

"Ah, *ma foi!*" said Coconnas; "look for yourself; I do not see it."

"Not see it!" replied La Mole. "Where can it be then?"

At this moment, as, after having turned everything upside down, La Mole was beginning to abuse the thieves who dared even rob in the Louvre, the door opened, and a page of the Duke d'Alençon appeared with the mantle in question.

"Ah!" said La Mole, "here it is."

"Yes, sir, monseigneur sent for it, to decide a wager about its color."

The page retired, and La Mole clasped on his cloak.

"Well," said he to Coconnas, "what are you going to do?"

"I do not know."

"Bah; well, *au revoir*"

"That La Mole is a terrible fellow," thought Coconnas; "he's always wanting to know where one is going, as if one knew;" and he composed himself to sleep.

As for La Mole, he betook himself to the Queen of Navarre's apartments.

In the corridor he met the Duke d'Alençon.

"Ah, 'tis you, La Mole!" said he.

"Yes, monseigneur."

"Are you going out of the Louvre?"

"No, your highness, I am going to pay my respects to the Queen of Navarre."

"At what time shall you quit her?"

"Has monseigneur any orders for me?"

"No, but I shall have this evening."

"At what hour?"

"From nine to ten."

"I will not fail to wait on your highness."

"Well, I rely upon you."

La Mole bowed, and went on.

"It is very strange," thought he, "the duke is pale sometimes as a corpse."

And he knocked at the door. Gillonne, who seemed to be watching his arrival, opened it, and conducted him to the queen. Marguerite was occupied with something that seemed to fatigue her greatly; a paper covered with notes, and a volume of Isocrates lay before her. She signed to La Mole to let her finish the sentence; and then, casting aside her pen, invited him to sit by her.

La Mole had never seemed so handsome and so gay.

"Greek!" cried he, glancing at the volume; "Isocrates! what are you doing? Ah, and on this paper Latin—'Ad

Sarmatiæ legatos reginæ Margaritæ concio,'—you are going to harangue these barbarians in Latin, then?"

"I must, since they do not understand French. They arrived this morning; and you will find," added Marguerite with a slight air of pedantry, "that what I have written is Ciceronian enough; but let us talk of what has happened to you."

"To me?"

"Yes!"

"What has happened to me?"

"Aye, what has happened to you?—you look pale."

"I confess it, but it is from too much sleep."

"Come, come, do not boast, I know all."

"Tell me what you mean, for I know not."

"Listen; De Mouy, surprised last night in the apartments of the King of Navarre, whom they wished to arrest, killed three men, and escaped without being recognized, except by the red mantle he wore."

"Well!"

"This red mantle, which deceived me, has deceived others also. You are suspected of this triple murder. This morning you would have been tried and condemned, for I knew that you would not, even to save yourself, say where you really were."

"Say where I was?" cried La Mole; "oh, never, never! I would have died joyfully to spare your glorious eyes but one tear."

"Alas, my poor friend!" replied the queen, "my glorious eyes would have wept many, many tears!"

"But how was this storm appeased?"

"Guess."

"I cannot."

"There was but one way of proving you were not in the king's chamber."

"And that was——"

"To say where you were."

"Well!"

"And I said it."

"To whom?"

"To my mother."

"And Queen Catherine——"

"Knows that I love you."

"Oh, madame, after having done so much for me, my life belongs to you!"

"I have snatched it from those who wished to take it; but now you are saved."

"Saved by you!" cried the young man; "by you, whom I adore——"

At this moment, a sharp noise made them both start. La Mole recoiled, and Marguerite, uttering a cry, fixed her eyes on a broken pane in the window. By this pane a large stone had entered, and lay on the floor.

La Mole saw the broken window, and, comprehending the cause of the noise:

"Who has dared do this?" cried he.

"Stay," said Marguerite; "it seems to me something is fastened to the stone."

"It looks like a billet," replied La Mole.

Marguerite eagerly caught up the stone, round which was wound a slip of paper. The paper was fastened to a thread which passed out of the window.

Marguerite opened and read it.

"Oh, Heavens!" cried she, holding out the paper, "La Mole!"

He looked and read:

"M. de la Mole is waited for by long swords in the corridor leading to M. d'Alençon's apartments; perhaps he would prefer leaving the Louvre by this window, and joining M. de Mouy at Mantes."

"But," said La Mole, "are these swords longer than mine?"

"No, but there are perhaps ten against one."

"From whom comes this billet?" asked La Mole.

Marguerite looked attentively at it.

"The writing of the King of Navarre," said she. "If he warns us, the danger is real—fly, then, fly!"

"How?"

"Does it not mention the window?"

"Command, and I will leap from the window, were it twenty times as high!"

"Stay," said Marguerite, "this string supports a weight."

"Let us see."

And both drawing towards them the string, saw the extremity of a ladder of silk.

"Ah, you are saved," said Marguerite.

"It is a miracle of Heaven!"

"No, it is a gift of the King of Navarre."

"What if it were a snare laid for me," said La Mole. "What if this ladder were to break beneath me: have you not to-day avowed your love for me, Marguerite?"

Marguerite, to whose cheeks joy had restored the color, became deadly pale.

"You are right," said she; "it is possible." And she darted towards the door.

"Where are you going?" cried La Mole.

"To assure myself you are really waited for on the corridor."

"Never, lest their vengeance fall on you!"

"What can they do to me? A queen and a woman, I am doubly inviolable."

The queen said this with so much dignity that La Mole felt she ran no risk, and that it was best to let her do as she wished. Marguerite entrusted La Mole to Gillonne, leaving it to her sagacity to decide, according to circumstances, whether he should fly, or await her return. She advanced into the corridor that led to the library and a suite of reception-rooms, which opened into the king's and queen-mother's apartments, and to the private staircase leading to D'Alençon's apartments.

Although scarcely nine, all the lights were extinguished, and, except a slight glimmer at the end, the corridor was quite dark. The queen advanced with a firm step, but arrived half-way, she heard a sound of voices whispering, and the pains they took not to be heard, gave them a mysterious and hollow sound, but all noise soon ceased, and the light, feeble as it was, seemed to diminish.

Marguerite advanced; she seemed calm, but in reality the clenching of her hands showed violent nervous agitation. As she approached the lights, the silence seemed to grow more intense, and a shadow like a hand obscured the flickering ray. Suddenly, a man sprang forward, uncovered a taper, and exclaimed:

"Here he is!"

Marguerite found herself opposite Charles, behind him stood D'Alençon, a cord of silk in his hand. At the back two shadows were visible, with swords in their hands.

Marguerite saw all this at a glance, and replied, smilingly:

"You mean here *she* is."

Charles recoiled; the rest stood motionless.

"You here, Margot, at this hour?" said he.

"Is it, then, so late?"

"I ask you where are you going?"

"To fetch one of the volumes of Cicero, left in our mother's apartments."

"Without a light?"

"I thought the corridor was lighted."

"And you come from your own apartments?"

"Yes."

"What are you doing?"

"Preparing my speech for the Polish ambassadors."

"Is any one helping you?"

Marguerite made a violent effort.

"M. de la Mole," replied she. "He is very learned."

"So much so," said D'Alençon, "that I requested him to help me, as I am not so clever as you are."

"You are waiting for him?"

"Yes," returned D'Alençon, impatiently.

"Then," said Marguerite, "I will send him to you."

"And your book!" said Charles.

"Gillonne can fetch it."

The two brothers interchanged a sign.

"Go, then," said Charles. "We will continue our round."

"Your round?" asked Marguerite—"whom are you looking for, then?"

"The little red man," returned Charles; "do not you know he is said to haunt the Louvre? D'Alençon says he has seen him, and we are in search of him."

"Success to your chase," said Marguerite.

In a second she was at her door.

"Open, Gillonne!" cried she.

Gillonne obeyed.

Marguerite sprang into the apartment, and found La Mole resolute and calm—his sword drawn. "Fly!" said the queen; "fly instantly!—there is no time to be lost!"

During her absence, La Mole had attached the ladder, and he now stepped on it, after having tenderly embraced the queen.

"Should I perish, remember your promise!" said he.

"It is not a promise, but an oath. Adieu!"

Encouraged by these words, La Mole glided down the ladder.

At this moment some one knocked at the door.

Marguerite did not quit the window until she had seen La Mole reach the ground in safety.

"Madame!" said Gillonne; "madame!"

"Well."

"The king is knocking at the door."

"Open it."

Gillonne did so.

The four princes, doubtless impatient, stood at the threshold; Charles entered.

Marguerite advanced to meet him.

The king cast a rapid glance around.

"Whom are you seeking?" asked the queen.

"Whom am I seeking?" said Charles. "*Corbœuf!* I am seeking M. de la Mole."

"M. de la Mole?"

"Yes! where is he?"

Marguerite took her brother's hand, and led him to the window.

At this moment, two men from beneath the window started off on horseback, at full speed; one of them detached his white satin scarf, and waved it in the air. They were La Mole and Orthon.

Marguerite pointed them out with her finger to Charles.

"What does this mean?" asked he.

"It means," returned Marguerite, "that M. d'Alençon may put his cord in his pocket, and MM. d'Anjou and Guise may sheathe their swords, for M. de la Mole will not pass through the corridor to-night."

CHAPTER XL.

THE ATRIDES.

SINCE his return to Paris, Henry d'Anjou had not had a confidential interview with his mother Catherine, of whom, as everybody knows, he was the favorite son.

And Catherine really preferred this child for his courage, or even more for his beauty. She alone knew of his return to Paris, of which Charles IX. would have remained ignorant if chance had not conducted him to the Hôtel de Condé at the moment when his brother was quitting it. Charles had not expected him until the next day, and Henry d'Anjou had hoped to conceal from him the two motives which had hastened his arrival by a day, namely, his visit to the lovely Marie de Cleves, Princess de Condé, and his conference with the Polish ambassadors.

When the Duke d'Anjou, so long expected, entered his mother's apartment, Catherine, usually so cold and unmoved, and who, since the departure of her son, had embraced no one with warmth except Coligny, who was to be murdered next day, opened her arms to the child of her love, and pressed him to her heart with an effusion of maternal affection astonishing to find in that withered heart.

"Ah, madame," said he, "since Heaven gives me the satisfaction of embracing my mother without witness, pray console the most wretched man in the world."

"Eh, *mon Dieu!* my dearest child," cried Catherine, "what has happened to you?"

"Nothing that you do not know, mother; I am in love; I am beloved; but this very love, which would form the bliss of any other, causes my misery."

"Explain yourself, my son," said Catherine.

"Ah! mother— these ambassadors—this departure."

"Yes," said Catherine, "the ambassadors have arrived —the departure is nigh at hand."

"It need not be nigh at hand, but my brother urges it; he hates me; I am in his way, and he would fain be rid of me."

Catherine smiled.

"By giving you a throne?—unhappy crowned head!"

"Oh, I need it not, mother," replied Henry, in agony; "I do not wish to go. I! a son of France! brought up in the refinement of polished manners, beside a tender mother; beloved by one of the most charming women on earth, must I go, then, amidst snows at the furthest extremity of the earth, to die by inches, amongst coarse rough people, who are intoxicated from morning till night, and gauge the capacities of their king as they do those of a cask, according to the quantity it can hold! No, no, my mother, I will not go; I will die first!"

"Courage, Henry," said Catherine, pressing his hands between her own, "let us inquire into the real reason."

Henry lowered his eyes, as if he dared not let his mother read what was in his heart.

"Is there no other reason," she asked, "less romantic, more reasonable, more public?"

"Mother, it is not my fault if this idea dwells in my mind, and perchance retains a place it should not hold; but have you not said yourself that the horoscope of my brother Charles prophesies that he will die young?"

"Yes," replied Catherine, "but a horoscope may lie, my son. I myself, at this moment, hope that all horoscopes are not true."

"But did not his horoscope declare this?"

"His horoscope spoke of a quarter of a century, but did not say if it were for his life or for his reign."

"Well, then, dear mother, contrive that I remain; my brother is nearly four-and-twenty, and another year must decide."

Catherine pondered deeply. "Yes, assuredly," she said, "it would be better if it could be so arranged."

"Oh, judge then, my mother," cried Henry, "what despair for me, if I were to exchange the crown of France for the crown of Poland! To be tormented there with the idea that I might reign at the Louvre, in the midst of this lettered and elegant court, near the best mother in the world, whose counsels would save me one half of my fatigue and labors, who, accustomed to bear with my father a portion of the burthen of the state, would kindly bear it also with me. Ah, my mother, I should have been a great king!"

"Come, come, my dearest child," said Catherine, to whom this prospect had always been a very sweet hope, "come, do not despair. Have you thought of any way by which this could be arranged?"

"Yes, assuredly, and that is the principal reason why I returned two or three days before I was expected, making my brother Charles believe that it was for Madame de Condé; then I have formed an acquaintance with Lasco, the principal envoy, doing all I could to make myself unpopular and disliked, and I hope I have succeeded."

"Ah, my dear son," said Catherine, "that is bad; we must always put the interest of France before your petty dislikes."

"Mother, does the interest of France require, in case of any misfortune happening to my brother Charles, that D'Alençon or the King of Navarre should ascend the throne?"

"Oh, the King of Navarre! Never! never!" murmured Catherine.

"*Ma foi!*" continued Henry, "my brother D'Alençon is no better, and does not love you more."

"Well," asked Catherine, "and what said Lasco?"

"Lasco hesitated when I pressed him to seek an audience. Oh! if he would write to Poland, and annul the election."

"Folly, my son; very madness! What a Diet has consecrated is sacred."

"But then, mother, could not these Poles accept my brother in my stead?"

"This is difficult, if not impossible."

"Never mind: try; speak to the king, mother; ascribe all to my love for Madame de Condé; say I am mad, crazy about her. He saw me, besides, leave the hotel of the prince with Guise, who does me every service in that quarter."

"Yes, in order to make his league; you do not perceive this but I do."

"Yes, mother, yes; but, in the meantime, I make use of him. Should we not be glad when a man serves us whilst serving himself?"

"And what said the king when he met you?"

"He seemed to believe what I told him, which was, that love only had brought me back to Paris."

"But did he not ask you for any account of the rest of the night?"

"Yes, mother; but I went to sup at Nantouillet's where I made a great riot, so that the king might hear of it, and have no suspicion as to where I was."

"Then he knows nothing of your visit to Lasco?"

"Nothing."

"So much the better. I will try, then, to speak for you, my poor boy; but you know the intractable disposition of him with whom I have to deal."

"Charles will not allow me to remain. He detests me."

"He is jealous of you, my beautiful hero! Why are you so brave and fortunate? Why, at scarcely twenty years of age, have you gained battles like Alexander and Cæsar? But do not open your heart to every one. Pretend to be resigned, and pay your court to the king. Leave all the rest to me. *Apropos*, and how succeeded your expedition of last night?"

"It failed, mother. The gay gallant was warned, and escaped by the window."

"Some day," said Catherine, "I shall learn who is the bad genius who thus counteracts all my projects. In the meanwhile, I have my suspicion. Malediction be on him!"

"Then, mother——" said the Duke d'Anjou.

"Leave me to manage all;" and kissing Henry tenderly, he left the apartment.

The princes of the house then arrived. Charles was in a capital humor; for the assurance of his sister Marguerite had rather pleased than vexed him. He felt no offense against La Mole otherwise, and had awaited him with some ardor in the corridor, simply because it was a kind of chase.

D'Alençon, on the other hand, was much preoccupied. The repulsion he had always felt for La Mole had changed into hate from the moment he knew that he was beloved by his sister. Marguerite was, at the same time, meditative and alert. She had to remember and to watch. The Polish deputies had sent a copy of the harangues to be pronounced.

Marguerite, to whom no more mention had been made of the occurrences of the previous evening, than if they had never taken place, read the discourses; and except Charles, every one discussed what the replies should be. Charles allowed Marguerite to reply as she pleased. He was somewhat difficult in his choice of words for D'Alençon; but as to the discourse of Henry d'Anjou, he attacked it bitterly, and made endless corrections and additions.

This meeting, without having any decisive issue, tended to envenom the feelings of all. Henry d'Anjou, who had to rewrite nearly all his discourse, went out to perform his task. Marguerite, who had not heard of the King of Navarre since he had broken her window pane, went to his apartment, in the hope of finding him there. D'Alençon, who had read the hesitation in his brother D'Anjou's eyes, and surprised a meaning look between him and his mother, withdrew to ponder over what might be the fresh plot. Charles was going to his forge to finish a boar-spear he was making for himself, when Catherine stopped him.

Charles, who expected some opposition to his will from his mother, paused, and gazed sternly on her.

"Well," said he, "and what now?"

"One other word, sire: we had forgotten it, and yet it is of much importance. What day do you fix for the public reception?"

"True!" said the king, seating himself; "let us talk it over, mother. Well, what day shall it be?"

"I think," replied Catherine, "that in your majesty's silence, your apparent forgetfulness, there was something of deep calculation."

"Why so, mother?"

"Because," added the queen-mother, very quietly, "there is no need, my son, as it appears to me, that the Poles should see us crave their crown with such avidity."

"On the contrary, mother," said Charles, "they have hastened, by forced marches, from Warsaw hither. Honor for honor—politeness for politeness!"

"Your majesty may be right in one sense, as in another I am not wrong. Your opinion then is, that the public reception should be hastened?"

"Certainly; and is it not yours also?"

"You know that I have no opinions but such as are connected with your glory: and I tell you then, that thus hastening the affair, I should fear that you might be accused of profiting very quickly by this occasion which presents itself for relieving France of the costs and charges of your brother; but which assuredly he repays by rendering it back in glory and devotion."

"Mother," said Charles, "when my brother leaves France, I will so richly endow him that no one will even dare to think that you fear what they may say——"

"Well," said Catherine, "I give up, since you have such good answers to all my objections; but to receive this warlike people, who judge of the power of states from exterior signs, you must have a considerable display of troops; and I do not think that there are yet enough assembled in the Ile-de-France?"

"Excuse me, mother, but I had foreseen this event, and was prepared for it. I have recalled two battalions from Normandy; one from Guienne: my company of archers arrived yesterday from Brittany: the light horse spread over Lorraine will be in Paris in the course of the day, and, whilst it is supposed that I can scarcely command four regiments, I have twenty thousand men ready to appear."

"Ah! ah!" said Catherine, surprised, "then there is only one thing wanting; but that you will procure."

"What is that?"

"Money; I imagine you have not a superabundance."

"On the contrary, madame, on the contrary," said Charles IX.; "I have fourteen hundred thousand crowns in the Bastille: my private estates have this week brought me in eight hundred thousand crowns, which I have buried in my cellars in the Louvre; and in case of need, Nantouillet has three hundred thousand crowns besides, at my disposal."

Catherine trembled; for she had before seen Charles violent and passionate, but never provident.

"Well, then," she added, "your majesty thinks of everything—admirable! and if the tailors, embroiderers, and jewelers use despatch, your majesty will be ready to give this audience in less than six weeks."

"Six weeks!" exclaimed Charles, "why, mother, the tailors, embroiderers, and jewelers, have been hard at work since the day when they learnt of my brother's nomination, and all may be ready to-day, perhaps, but certainly in three or four days."

"Ah," murmured Catherine; "you are in greater haste than I thought, my son."

"Honor for honor, as I have already said."

"Good; then it is this honor done to the house of France that flatters you—is it not?"

"Assuredly."

"And to see a son of France on the throne of Poland is your chief desire?"

"Precisely so."

"Then it is the fact, and not the man, that affects you, and whoever may reign there——"

"No, no, mother, *corbœuf!* no. Let us be as we are! The Poles have made a good choice—they are skilful, clever fellows! A military nation, a people of soldiers, they take a captain for their ruler. *Peste!*—D'Anjou is their man. The hero of Jarnac and Moncontour suits them like a glove. Whom would you have me send them? D'Alençon—a coward!—he would give them a fine idea of the house of Valois! D'Alençon would flee the very first ball that whistled by his ears, whilst Henry d'Anjou is a warrior bold and tried; his sword always in his hand, always on the march, on his war-horse or on foot. Forward—cut down, thrust, crush, slay! Ah, he is a brave and skilful man, my brother D'Anjou: a gallant soldier, who'll give them fighting from morning till night—from the first of January to the thirty-first of December! He is not a hard drinker, it is true; but he will do his work in cold blood, you see. He will be in his element, dear Henry will!—On! on! to the field of battle! bravo, trumpets and drums! *Vive le roi!* Long live the conqueror! Long live the general! They will proclaim him emperor three times a-year! This will be admirable for the house of France and the honor of the Valois! he may be killed perchance, but *ventre-mahom!* it will be a glorious death!"

Catherine shuddered, but her eyes glanced fire.

"Say," she cried, "that you wish to send your brother, Henry d'Anjou away. Say you do not love your brother."

"Ah, ah, ah!" exclaimed Charles, laughing nervously; "what, have you divined that I wished to send him away? Have you divined that I do not love him? And suppose it were so? Love my brother!—why should I love my brother? Ah, ah, ah, would you make me laugh?" and as he spoke, his pale cheeks were animated with feverish red. "Does he love me? Do you love me? Is there, except my dogs, Marie Touchet, and my nurse, is there one living thing that has ever loved me? No, no, I do not love my brother; I love only myself—do you understand? and I do not prevent my brother from doing as I do."

"Sire," said Catherine, becoming animated in her turn, "since you unfold your heart to me, I must open mine to you. You act like a weak king—like an ill-advised king: you send away your second brother, the natural support of your throne, who is, in all respects, fit to succeed you, if and misfortune happened to you—leaving, in this event, your crown in jeopardy; for, as you said, D'Alençon is young, incapable, weak—more than weak—cowardly! and the Béarnais is waiting in the background!"

"Well, *mort de tout les diables!*" cried Charles, "what is that to me when I am dead? The Béarnais is waiting in the background, say you? *Corbœuf!* so much the better! I said I loved no one—I was wrong: I love Harry—yes, I love the good Harry, with his free air and his warm hand, whilst I see around me none but false eyes, and touch none but ice-cold hands. He is incapable of treason towards me, I will swear! Besides, I owe a recompense: they poisoned his mother, poor fellow; some persons of my family, too, it is said. Besides, I am in good health; but if I felt sick, I would send for him, and he should not quit my side · I would take nothing but from his hand; and, should I die, I would make him King of France and Navarre, and, *ventre du pape!* instead of laughing at my death, as my brother would do, he would weep, or at least appear to do so."

Had a thunderbolt fallen at Catherine's feet, she would have been less alarmed than at these words. She remained aghast, looking at Charles with a haggard eye; and then, at the end of a few seconds, she cried:

"Henry of Navarre! Henry of Navarre, King of France, to the prejudice of my children! Ah, *sainte Madona!* we will see! It is for this you would send away my son of Anjou?"

"Your son! and what, then, am I—a son of the wolf, like Romulus?" cried Charles, trembling with rage, and his eye sparkling as if it were on fire. "Your son! You are right; and the King of France, then, is not your son? The King of France has no brothers; the King of France has no mother; the King of France has no subjects! the King of France has no need of sentiment—he has will. He can do without being loved, but he will be obeyed!"

"Sire, you have mistaken my words. I called him my son who is about to leave me. I love him better at this moment, because I fear to lose him at this moment. Is it a crime for a mother to desire that her son should not leave her?"

"And I—I tell you he shall leave you. I tell you he shall leave France, and go to Poland, and that in two days—and if you add one word, in one day—to-morrow; and if you do not smooth your brow, and lose the menace that glares in your eyes, I will strangle him to-night, as you would have strangled your daughter's lover yester-night; only I will not miss my clutch of him as we did of La Mole."

At this threat Catherine bent down her head, and then again instantly raised it.

"Ah, poor child!" she said, "your brother would kill you; but be tranquil, your mother will defend you."

"Do you brave me?" cried Charles. "Well, then, by all the devils! he shall die—not this evening, but this very moment. A weapon! a weapon! a dagger! knife!—ah!"

Charles, after having vainly sought all around for what he asked for, saw the small stiletto which his mother wore at her girdle, seized it, drew it from its shagreen and silver case, and rushed out of the chamber, with the determination of striking Henry d'Anjou wherever he found him; but on reaching the vestibule, his over-excited strength gave way suddenly, and, extending his arm, he let fall the keen weapon, which stuck in the floor, and uttering a lamentable cry, he swooned and fell on the floor, whilst the blood flowed abundantly from his nose and his mouth.

"Help!" he cried; "they kill me! help! help!"

Catherine, who had followed, saw him fall, looked at him for an instant without moving or calling, and then recalled to herself, not by maternal instinct, but by the difficulty of her situation, she opened a door, and shrieked out:

"The king is taken ill. Help! help!"

At this cry, a crowd of servants, officers, and courtiers, hastened to the young king; but foremost of all a woman rushed on, pushing aside the crowd, and raised Charles, who was as pale as a corpse.

"They are killing me, nurse—they are killing me!" murmured the king, bathed in perspiration and blood.

"They are killing my Charles!" cried the good creature, looking every one in the face in a way that made even Catherine retreat; "and who is killing you?"

Charles uttered a sigh, and again fainted.

"Ah, ah!" said the doctor, Ambroise Paré, whom they had sent for; "ah! the king is very ill."

"Now, by choice of compulsion," said the implacable Catherine to herself, "he must accede to a delay:" and she left the king to go to her second son, who was awaiting in the oratory the result of an interview so vitally important to himself.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE HOROSCOPE.

On leaving the oratory, in which her son had been acquainted with what had passed, Catherine found René in her chamber.

"Well," asked the queen, "have you seen him?"

"Yes."

"How is he?"

"Rather better."

"Can he speak?"

"No, the sword has traversed the larynx."

"I told you to make him write."

"I tried, but he could only trace two letters, and then fainted; the jugular vein has been cut into, and the loss of blood has greatly weakened him."

"Have you seen these letters?"

"Here they are."

René took a paper from his pocket, and presented it to the queen, who hastily opened it.

"An *m* and an *o*," said she. "Can it be, after all, M. de la Mole—and that the confession of Marguerite's was only to avert suspicion?"

"Madame," returned René, "if I may venture an opinion, I should say M. de la Mole is too much in love to trouble his head about politics; and, above all, too much in love with Madame Marguerite to serve her husband very devotedly, for there is no deep love without jealousy."

"You think him in love, then?"

"Desperately."

"Has he had recourse to you?"

"Yes; I made him a waxen image."

"Pierced to the heart?"

"To the heart."

"Have you it still?"

"At my house."

"I wonder," said Catherine, "if these cabalistic preparations have really the power attributed to them?"

"Your majesty knows even more than I what their influence is."

"Does Marguerite love La Mole?"

"Sufficiently to ruin herself for him. Yesterday she saved him at the risk of her honor and her life; you see all this, and yet you doubt."

"Doubt what?"

"Science."

"I doubt because science has deceived me," looking fixedly at René.

"On what occasion?"

"René, have your perfumes lost their odor?"

"No, madame; not when I prepare them."

"Well, well," said Catherine, "we will speak of that some other time. Tell me what is necessary to arrive at an idea of the probable length of a person's life?"

"To know, first, the day of his birth, his age, and what constellation he was born under."

"Next?"

"To have some of his blood and hair."

"If I bring and tell you all you require, can you tell me the probable time of his death?"

"Yes within a few days."

"I have his hair, and I will procure some of his blood."

"Was he born in the day, or during the night?"

"At twenty-three minutes past five in the evening."

"Be with me to-morrow at five o'clock; the experiment must be made at the precise hour of the birth."

"Good!" said Catherine. "*We* will be there."

René saluted, and retired without affecting to notice the "*we*," which indicated that, contrary to her usual habits the queen would not come alone.

The next morning, at daybreak, Catherine entered her son Charles's apartment; she had inquired after him at midnight, and was informed that Maitre Ambroise Paré was with him, and intended bleeding him if the same nervous agitation continued. Shuddering even in his slumbers, pale from loss of blood, Charles slept, his head resting on his faithful nurse's shoulder, who, leaning against the bed, had not changed her position for three hours, fearing to disturb him.

Catherine asked if her son had not been bled. The nurse replied he had, and so abundantly that he had twice fainted.

The blood was in a basin in the adjoining room; Catherine entered, under pretense of examining it, and whilst so doing, she filled with it a phial she had brought with her for the purpose, then returned, hiding her red fingers, that would otherwise have betrayed her, in her pockets.

As she reappeared, Charles opened his eyes, and perceived his mother; then, recollecting the events of the previous evening, "Ah! it is you, madame," said he;

"well, you may tell your dear son, Henry d'Anjou, it will be to-morrow."

"It shall be when you please, my dear Charles; compose yourself, and go to sleep."

Charles closed his eyes, and Catherine left the room, but no sooner had she quitted it, than Charles, raising himself, cried, "Send for the chancellor—the court—I want them all!"

The nurse replaced his head upon her shoulder, and sought to lull him to sleep.

"No, no, nurse!" said he, "I shall not sleep any more. Summon my people; I wish to work to-day."

When Charles spoke thus, no one dared disobey, and even the nurse, spite of the familiarity she enjoyed, did not venture to dispute his orders. The chancellor was summoned, and the audience fixed, not for the morrow, but for the fifth day from that time.

At five o'clock, the queen and the Duke d'Anjou proceeded to René's, who, in expectation of their visit, had prepared everything for the experiment. In the chamber on the right, that is, in the chamber of sacrifice, a blade of steel, covered with singular arabesques, was heating in a brazier of charcoal. On the altar lay the book of fate, and as the previous night had been very clear, René had been enabled to consult the stars.

Henry d'Anjou entered first. He had false hair, and his face and figure were concealed beneath a mask and large cloak. His mother followed him, and had she not been aware of his disguise, would not have recognized him. The queen took off her mask; D'Anjou, however, did not follow her example.

"Have you consulted the stars?" asked Catherine.

"I have, madame, and they have already informed me of the past. The person whose fate you desire to know has, like all persons born under *Cancer*, a fiery and ardent disposition; he is powerful, he has lived nearly a quarter of a century, Heaven has granted him wealth and power—is it not so, madame?"

"Perhaps."

"Have you his hair and blood?"

"Here they are."

And Catherine gave the magician a lock of fair hair and a small phial of blood.

René took the phial, shook it, and let fall on the glowing steel blade a large drop of blood that boiled for a second, and then spread itself into a thousand fantastic shapes.

"Oh" cried René, "I see him convulsed with agony. Hark! how he groans— see, how all around him turns to blood—see how, around his death-bed, combats and wars arise; and see, here are the lances and swords!"

"Will this be long first?" asked Catherine, seizing the hand of her son, who, in his anxiety to see, had leaned over the brazier.

René approached the altar, and repeated a cabalistic prayer; then he rose, and announcing all was ready, took in one hand the phial and in the other the lock of hair, and bidding Catherine open at hazard the book of fate, he poured on the steel blade all the blood and cast the hair in the fire, pronouncing a mystic formula as he did so.

Instantly the Duke d'Anjou and Catherine saw on the blade a figure resembling a corpse wrapped in a winding-sheet.

Another figure, that of a woman, leaned over it.

At the same time, the hair burned, casting out one jet of flame like a fiery tongue.

"A year," cried René, "scarce a year, and this man shall die! One woman alone shall lament over him; and yet, no: at the end of the blade is another female, with an infant in her arms."

Catherine looked at her son, as if, though herself the mother of the man whose death was announced, she would ask him who these two women could be. But scarcely had René finished, when the forms disappeared. Then Catherine opened the book at hazard, and read, with a voice that trembled in spite of herself the following distich:

"Ainsi a peri cil que l'on redoutoi.,
Plutost, trop tost, si prudence n'etoit."

"And for him that you wot of," said Catherine, "what say the signs?"

"Favorable as ever; unless Providence interpose to thwart his destiny, he is sure to be fortunate, but——"

"But what?"

"One of the stars composing his pleiad was covered by a black cloud during my observations."

"Ah, a black cloud!—but there is some hope?"

"Of whom speak you, madame?" asked D'Anjou.

Catherine drew her son on one side, and spoke to him in a low voice.

During this interval, René, kneeling by the brazier, poured into the hollow of his hand the last drop of blood.

"Strange," murmured he. "It only proves how little can human knowledge compete with ours. To every one but me, even to Ambroise Paré, this blood, so pure, so full of health, promises years of life, and yet all will be useless ere a year expire."

Catherine and Henry turned and listened.

"Ah!" continued René, "to the uninitiated the present is manifest, but to us the future is also manifest."

"He will die, then, before the year be over?" said the queen-mother.

"As surely as there are three persons present who must one day repose in the grave."

"Yet you say the blood indicates a long life?"

"Yes, if things were to follow the natural course; but an accident——"

"Ah, yes," whispered Catherine to Henry; "an accident."

"The greater reason for staying."

"Oh, that is impossible."

Then, turning to René: "Thanks," said the young man, disguising the tone of his voice; "take this purse."

"Come, *count*," said Catherine, purposely using this title, to divert René's suspicions. And they left the chamber.

"Mother," cried Henry, "you hear?—an accident:

should it happen, I shall be four hundred leagues away."

"Four hundred leagues may be accomplished in eight days."

"Yes; but who knows if they will suffer me to return."

"Who knows," replied the queen, "but this illness of the king's may be the accident of which René spoke. Go, Henry, go, and beware of irritating your brother, should you see him."

CHAPTER XLII.

MUTUAL CONFIDENCES.

THE first thing the Duke d'Anjou learned on reaching the Louvre was, that the solemn entry of the ambassadors was fixed for the fifth day. The tailors and jewelers waited on the prince with magnificent dresses and superb ornaments which the king had ordered for him.

Whilst he fitted them on in a state of anger that brought tears to his eyes, Henry of Navarre was amusing himself greatly with a splendid collar of emeralds, a gold-hilted sword, and a very valuable ring, which Charles had sent him that morning.

D'Alençon had just received a letter, and had retired to his chamber, in order to read it at his leisure.

As to Coconnas, he was asking for his friend from every echo in the Louvre. At length, the rumor of the affair in the corridor began to be bruited about. Coconnas was in the utmost grief: for a moment he believed that all these kings and princes had killed his friend and thrown his body into some dungeon.

He learned that D'Alençon had been of the party, and overlooking the dignity that encompassed a prince of the blood, he went to him to demand an explanation with as little ceremony as if he had been a private gentleman.

D'Alençon, at first, was inclined to show the door to an impertinent who came to ask an account of his actions;

but Coconnas spoke so sternly, his eyes glared with so much rage, and an adventure of three duels in less than twenty hours which he had had, placed the Piedmontese so high, that he paused, and instead of giving way to his first impulse, replied with a charming smile:

"My dear Coconnas, it is true that the king, furious at having received on his shoulder a silver ewer, the Duke d'Anjou, angry at having orange jam poured on his head, and the Duke de Guise, humiliated by having been assailed with a haunch of venison, combined to kill M. de la Mole; but a friend of your friend's averted the blow, and I assure you the enterprise failed."

"Ah," said Coconnas, breathing as loudly at this information as a smith's bellows; "ah, *mordi!* monseigneur, that is well; and I should like to know this friend, to prove my gratitude."

D'Alençon made no reply, but smiled more agreeably still, which made Coconnas believe that this friend was none other than the prince himself.

"Well, monseigneur," he continued, "since you have done so much as to tell me the commencement of this story, will you complete the obligation by relating to me the conclusion?"

D'Alençon shook his head.

"The worst of all," he said, "my brave Coconnas, is, that your friend disappeared without any one knowing whither."

"*Mordi!*" cried the Piedmontese, again turning pale with indignation; "but I will know where he is!"

"Go to the Queen Marguerite," said D'Alençon who was as anxious as Coconnas to learn where De la Mole was; "she will know what has become of the friend you lament."

"I had already thought of doing so," replied Coconnas.

"Do so," added the prince; "only do not say it was by my advice; for if you are so imprudent, you may not obtain any information."

"Monseigneur," said Coconnas, "as your royal highness recommends me to secrecy on this point, I will be as mute as a tench, or the queen-mother. Good prince! excellent prince! magnanimous prince!" murmured Coconnas, as he went to the Queen of Navarre.

Marguerite was awaiting Coconnas; for the noise of his despair had reached her, and she almost forgave him his somewhat coarse behavior to Madame de Nevers, whom the Piedmontese had not visited, in consequence of a dispute between them two or three days previously. He was therefore introduced to the queen as soon as announced.

Coconnas entered, not altogether able to surmount the embarrassment which he always felt to a certain extent in the presence of the queen, and which was the greater from her superiority of wit than of rank; but Marguerite greeted him with a smile which instantly reassured him.

"Ah, madame!" he exclaimed, "restore my friend to me, I entreat you; or, at least, tell me what has become of him; for without him I cannot live. Suppose Euryalus without Nisus, Damon without Pythias, or Orestes without Pylades, and have pity on my misfortune at the loss of my dear friend."

Marguerite smiled, and after having bound Coconnas to secrecy, told him all about the escape by the window. As to the place of his concealment, although Coconnas urged her to reveal it with all earnestness, she decidedly refused, but added:

"Well, if you wish to learn something decisive as to your friend, ask the King of Navarre, who is the only person that has a right to speak. As for me, all I can tell you is, that he you are seeking lives; have faith in my word!"

"I have faith in something still more sure, madame: those lovely eyes have not been weeping."

Then, thinking he could not add anything to this compliment, he retired, fully resolved to seek a reconciliation with Madame de Nevers, just to find if she knew more than Marguerite would tell him. The idea of leaving Marguerite had almost broken La Mole's heart, and it was rather to save the reputation of the queen than to preserve his own life that he had consented to fly. Thus the next evening he returned to Paris, to try and see Marguerite, at her balcony. Marguerite, on her side, as if a secret voice had informed her that he would be there, had passed the evening at her window, and thus they had seen each other with happiness, a sentiment that may be readily imagined.

La Mole, anxious to be always near Marguerite, occupied himself in organizing, with all possible despatch, the event which would restore her to him, namely, the flight of the King of Navarre.

Marguerite having thus seen La Mole, and being aware of his safety, was at ease with respect to him, but fearing he might be watched and followed, she pertinaciously refused to give him any other meeting than these *à l'Espagnole,* which took place every evening until the night before the reception of the ambassadors. On this evening, about nine o'clock, when all the persons in the Louvre were preoccupied with the preparations for next day, Marguerite opened her window and went into the balcony; but scarcely was she there, than the note she expected, according to La Mole's usual custom, was thrown with his usual skill, and fell at the feet of his royal mistress. As he had generally awaited her missive, Marguerite understood, that by anticipating her he had some important intelligence to communicate, and read it with all haste. The billet in the first page contained these words:

"MADAME,—I must speak to the King of Navarre; it is on a most urgent matter. I am waiting."

And in the second page, which could be detached from the other, was written:

"MY LADY AND QUEEN,—Manage that I may speak with you. I am waiting."

Marguerite had scarcely finished the second side of this letter than she heard the voice of Henry of Navarre, who, with his usual reserve, tapped at the door, and asked Gillonne if he might be allowed to enter.

The queen instantly divided the sheet of paper, put one of the pages in her pocket, ran to the window, which she shut, and going quickly to the door, said: "Come in, sire."

Gently, quickly and cleverly as Marguerite had closed the window, the sound had reached the ears of Henry, whose senses were always on the alert, and who had in the society he so greatly mistrusted acquired that exquisite delicacy of hearing and sight which man acquires in a savage state. But the King of Navarre was not one of those tyrants who wish to prevent their wives from taking the air and gazing on the stars. Henry was smiling and urbane as usual.

"Madame," he said, "whilst our people of the court are trying on their fine apparel, I have come to have a few words with you as to my affairs, which you still regard as your own, do you not?"

"Most assuredly, sir," replied Marguerite; "are not our interests always identical?"

"Yes, madame; and therefore I wished to ask your opinion as to the pains which D'Alençon has taken for several days to avoid me, so much so, that since the day before yesterday he has betaken himself to Saint-Germains. Do you not think from this, that it is his intention either to go away alone, or not to go at all Let me, if you please, have your ideas on this point; for it would have great weight with me if your opinion should coincide with mine."

"Your majesty is quite right to feel uneasy as to my brother's silence. I have thought of it all day; and it is my opinion, that, circumstances having changed, he has changed with them."

"That is to say, that seeing King Charles ill, and the Duke d'Anjou King of Poland, he would not be sorry to remain in Paris to watch for the crown of France."

"Precisely so."

"I agree with you. This is all as I wish it," continued

Henry. "Let him remain; that will not alter our plan; for I should require, to go alone, thrice the guarantees I should have asked had your brother accompanied me, whose name and presence in the enterprise would have been my safeguards. The only thing that astonishes me is, not having any tidings of De Mouy. Have you any intelligence of him, madame?"

"I, sire!" said Marguerite, astonished. "How could I possibly——"

"Eh, *pardieu, ma mie!* nothing can be more natural. You were so kind as to oblige me by saving young La Mole's life; he was sure to go to Mantes, and when there, it was no great distance to return hither."

"Ah! that gives me the solution to a riddle I have sought for in vain," replied Marguerite. "I had left my window open, and found on my return a kind of note on the carpet."

"There, now!" said Henry.

"A note which at first I could not comprehend, and to which I attached no importance," continued Marguerite. "Perhaps I was wrong, and it comes from that quarter."

"Very possibly," said Henry; "nay, most probably. Might I see this note?"

"Certainly, sire," replied Marguerite, handing to the king the half sheet of paper which she had put in her pocket.

The king looked at it.

"Is not this," he inquired, "the writing of M. de la Mole?"

"I do not know," was Marguerite's reply; "the letters appear to me counterfeited."

"Never mind; let us read." And he read:

"'MADAME,—I must speak to the King of Navarre. It is on a most urgent matter. I am waiting.'—Ah, do you see?" said Henry; "he says he is waiting!"

"Yes, I see he says; but what then?"

"Why, *ventre-saint-gris!* I wish him to come here."

"Come here!" exclaimed Marguerite, fixing on her husband her beautiful eyes, full of amazement; "how can you say such a thing, sire? A man whom the king has sought to kill—who is marked down, menaced. Let him come, do you say! Is that possible? Were doors made for those who have been——?"

"Obliged to escape by the window, you would say."

"Precisely so."

'Well, but if they know the way by the window, they may take that road again, since it is impossible for them to enter by the door. That is simple enough, surely."

"Do you think so?" said Marguerite, blushing with pleasure at the thoughts of again having La Mole near her.

"I am sure of it."

"But how can he ascend?" inquired the queen.

"Did you not preserve the rope-ladder I sent you?"

"Yes, sire," said Marguerite.

"Then the whole thing will be capitally managed. Fasten it to your balcony, and let it hang. If it be De Mouy who awaits—and I am induced to believe so—he will mount the ladder." And without losing his gravity, Henry took the taper to light Marguerite in her search for the ladder. The search was by no means tedious; it was discovered in a cupboard in the celebrated closet.

"Here it is," said Henry. "And now, madame, if it is not too much to ask of your complaisance, tie it, I beg, to the balcony."

"Why me and not you, sire?" asked Marguerite.

"Because the best conspirators are the most prudent; the sight of a man might alarm your correspondent—you understand?"

Marguerite smiled, and fastened the ladder.

"There," said Henry, ensconcing himself in the angle of the apartment; "now show yourself—and now let the ladder be dropped. Capital! I am sure De Mouy will come up."

And in a few minutes afterwards, a man joyously placed his leg over the balcony; but seeing that the queen did not approach him, remained for some minutes in hesitation, and then Henry advanced.

"Ah!" said he, urbanely, "it is not De Mouy; it is M. de la Mole. Good evening, M. de la Mole. Enter, I entreat you."

La Mole was for a moment amazed. Perchance, had he still been on the ladder, instead of having his feet firmly in the balcony, he would have fallen backwards.

"You desired to speak to the King of Navarre on an urgent affair," said Marguerite; "I have informed him so, and here he is."

Henry went to the window, and closed it.

"I love thee!" whispered Marguerite, pressing the young man's hand ardently.

"Well, sir," said Henry, handing a chair to La Mole, "what have we to say?"

"We have to say, sire," he replied, "that I have left M. de Mouy at the barrier. He desires to know if Maurevel has spoken, and if his presence in your majesty's chamber is known."

"Not yet; but it must be before long. We must therefore make haste."

"His opinion coincides with your majesty's, sire; and if to-morrow, during the evening, M. d'Alençon is ready to depart, De Mouy will be at the Porte Saint-Marcel with a hundred and fifty men; five hundred will await you at Fontainebleau, and then you will gain Blois, Angoulême, and Bordeaux."

"Madame," said Henry, turning to his wife, "to-morrow, I shall be ready; shall you?"

La Mole's eyes were fixed on Marguerite's with intense anxiety.

"You have my word," replied the queen. "Whithersoever you go, I follow you; but you know M. d'Alençon must go at the same time. There is no middle path for him; he is with us, or he betrays us; if he hesitates, we will not stir."

"Does he know anything of this proposed plan, M. de la Mole?" inquired Henry.

"He had a letter from De Mouy several days since."

"Ah, ah!" said Henry, "and never told me a word of it."

"Be on your guard, sir—be on your guard," said Marguerite.

"Be easy; I am on my guard. But how to return an answer to De Mouy?"

"Do not be under any anxiety, sire. To-morrow, on the right hand or left hand of your majesty, visible or invisible, during the reception of the ambassadors, he will be there; one word in the queen's address will make him understand whether you consent or not; whether he should flee, or await you. If the Duke d'Alençon refuses, he only requires a delay of a fortnight to reorganize everything in your name."

"Really," replied Henry, "De Mouy is an invaluable man. Can you introduce a phrase or two in your discourse, madame?"

"Nothing easier," replied Marguerite.

"Well, then," said Henry, "I shall see M. d'Alençon to-morrow; let De Mouy be at his post, and understand from half a word."

"He will be there, sire."

"Well, then, M. de la Mole, go and bear him my reply. You have, doubtless, a horse and servant somewhere near at hand."

"Orthon awaits me on the quay."

"Go to him, comte. Oh, not by the window; that is very well on extreme occasions; but you might be seen, and as it would not be known that it was for me that you exposed yourself, it would compromise the queen."

"But how then, sire?"

"If you could not enter the Louvre alone, you can at least go out of it with me who have the password. You have your cloak, I have mine; we will wrap ourselves up well, and shall pass the wicket without difficulty. Wait here whilst I see if the corridors are free."

Henry, with the most natural air in the world, went out to examine if the way was clear. La Mole remained alone with the queen.

"Oh, when shall we meet again?" said La Mole.

"To-morrow evening, if we flee; in the Rue Cloche-Percée, if we do not flee."

"M. de la Mole," said Henry, returning, "you may come; there is no one there."

La Mole bowed respectfully before the queen.

"Give him your hand to kiss, madame," said Henry; "M. de la Mole is no common servitor."

Marguerite obeyed.

"Apropos," added Henry. "Put away the rope-ladder carefully: it is a very precious instrument for conspirators, and at the moment we least think of, it may stand in stead. Come, De la Mole—come!"

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE AMBASSADORS.

NEXT morning, the whole population of Paris poured towards the Faubourg St. Antoine, by which it was decided that the Polish ambassadors should enter; a line of soldiers restrained the crowd, and a regiment of horse escorted the nobles and ladies of the court.

Soon appeared, close by the Abbey St.-Antoine, a troop of cavaliers dressed in red and yellow, with furred mantles and caps, and bearing large sabers curved like Turkish scimetars. Behind this troop came a second, clothed with oriental magnificence. They preceded the ambassadors, who, four in number, gorgeously sustained the reputation of their chivalrous country.

One of the ambassadors was the Bishop of Cracow; his costume was half ecclesiastical, half military, resplendent with gold and jewels. Next the bishop rode the palatine Lasco, a powerful noble, nearly related to the royal family, rich as a king, and as proud. Behind these two principal ambassadors, who were accompanied by two other palatines of high rank, came a number of gentlemen, whose steeds, all glitering with gold and precious stones, excited the clamorous admiration of the populace.

Up to the last moment Catherine had hoped the reception would be deferred in consequence of the king's illness. But when the day arrived—when she saw Charles, pale as a specter, assume the royal robes, she saw she must, in appearance at least, yield to his iron will, and began to believe that the safest plan for Henry d'Anjou was to depart into the splendid exile to which he was condemned.

The large reception chamber had been prepared, and as such ceremonies were usually public, the guards and sentinels had received orders to admit as many persons into the apartments and courts as they could possibly contain.

As for Paris, it presented the same aspect that every great city presents on similar occasions—that is, confusion and curiosity; only, had any one attentively examined the population, he would have remarked a considerable number of men in cloaks, who exchanged glances and signs when at a distance, and, when they met, a few rapid words in a low tone. They seemed much occupied with the procession, and received their orders from an old man, whose keen black eyes, spite of his long white beard and eyebrows, bespoke a vigorous activity. This old man, by his own and his followers' assistance, gained an entrance to the Louvre, and, thanks to the officer of the Swiss guard, obtained a place behind the ambassadors, and opposite Henry and Marguerite.

Henry, informed by La Mole that De Mouy in some disguise would be present, looked round on every side. At last his eyes encountered those of the old man, and a sign from De Mouy dissipated all doubt as to his identity; for De Mouy was so perfectly disguised, that the King of Navarre was doubtful as to whether this old man with a white beard could be the intrepid Huguenot chief, who a few days before had made so desperate a defense.

A word from Henry fixed Marguerite's attention on De Mouy. Then her eyes wandered round the chamber in search of La Mole. La Mole was not there.

The orations commenced. The first was to the king: Lasco, in the name of the Diet of Poland, demanded his consent to the Duke d'Anjou becoming their king.

The king's reply was brief and precise. He presented to them the Duke d'Anjou, of whose courage he made a high eulogium. He spoke in French, and an interpreter translated what he said at the end of each sentence.

Whilst the interpreter was speaking, the king applied his handkerchief continually to his mouth, and as often as he removed it a stain of blood was visible.

When Charles had finished, Lasco turned to D'Anjou, and offered him, in the name of the Diet, the throne of Poland. Lasco's address was in Latin.

The duke replied, in the same language, and in a voice he in vain strove to render firm, that he gratefully accepted the honor offered to him. During all this time Charles, who remained standing, with lips compressed, fixed his eyes on him, like an eagle watching his prey.

When the duke had finished, Lasco took the crown of the Jagellons from the velvet cushion on which it rested, and whilst two Polish nobles, placed the royal robes on the duke, deposited the crown in Charles's hands.

Charles signed to his brother. D'Anjou knelt before him, and, with his own hands, Charles placed the crown on his head, and the two brothers interchanged a kiss full of bitter hate.

A herald then cried: "Alexander Edward Henry of France Duke d'Anjou, is crowned King of Poland. God save the King of Poland!"

All the assembly repeated: "God save the King of Poland!"

Then Lasco turned to Marguerite. Her discourse had been reserved till the last, and, as we have said, Marguerite had composed it herself.

Lasco's address was rather a eulogy than an oration. He had yielded, Sarmatian as he was, to his admiration of Marguerite's beauty; and while his language was that of Ovid, his style was that of Ronsard. His discourse was applauded by everybody: by those who understood Latin, because they partook of his admiration; by those who did not understand it, because they wished it to appear as though they did.

Marguerite, having made a gracious curtsey to the ambassador, fixed her eyes on De Mouy, and began thus:

"Quod nunc hâc in aulâ insperati adestis exultaremus ego et rex conjux, nisi idèo immineret calamitas, scilicet non solum fratris sed etiam amici orbitas."—("Your unlooked-for presence in this court would overwhelm my husband and myself with joy, did it not threaten us with a great misfortune; that is, not only the loss of a brother, but also that of a friend.")

These words had a double meaning, and whilst intended for De Mouy, were supposed to refer to the Duke d'Anjou. The latter, accordingly, bowed in token of gratitude.

Charles did not recollect having read this sentence in Marguerite's speech, when submitted to him some days before, but he did not trouble himself much about that; and, besides, he understood Latin very imperfectly.

Marguerite continued:

"Adèo dolemur a te dividi ut tecum proficisci maluissemus, sed idem fatum quo nunc sine ullâ morâ Lutetiâ cedere juberis, hâc in urbe detinet. Proficiscere ergo, frater; proficiscere amice; proficiscere sine nobis; proficiscentem, sequentur spes et desideria nostra."—("We are grieved to be separated from you, for we should have preferred going with you; but the same fate that compels you to quit Paris without delay, retains us in that city. Go, dear brother; go, then, dear friend—go without us. Our hopes and our wishes will follow you.")

It is easy to understand how attentively De Mouy had listened to these words, which, though addressed to the Duke d'Anjou, were meant for him alone. Whilst listening, Catherine was struck with the black eyes so piercing beneath their gray penthouses.

"What a strange face!" thought she. "Who can this man be who watches Marguerite so attentively, and whom Henry and Marguerite, on their part, look at with such earnestness?"

The Queen of Navarre continued, whilst Catherine strove in vain to divine the name of this strange old man, when the master of the ceremonies came behind her, and presented to her a little satin bag; she opened it, and found a paper containing these words: "Maurevel, by the aid of a cordial I have administered to him, has, in some measure, recovered his strength, and has written the name of the man in the King of Navarre's chamber. This man was M. de Mouy."

"De Mouy," thought the queen, "I fancied it was he; but this old man—eh, *cospetto!*—this old man is——"

She leaned towards the captain of her guards.

"Do you see," whispered she, "that old man with the white beard, and in the black velvet dress, behind Lasco?"

"He to whom the King of Navarre made a sign?"

"Yes; do not lose sight of him; station yourself at the door with ten men, and when he comes out, invite him, in the king's name, to dinner; if he accept, conduct him to the chamber, and keep him there; if he resist, seize him, dead or alive."

Fortunately, Henry had glanced at Catherine, and observing her eyes fixed so earnestly on De Mouy, became uneasy; when he saw her give an order to the captain of the guard, he guessed all. It was then he made the sign De Nancey had observed, and which meant, "Save yourself—you are discovered!" But Henry was not quite reassured until De Nancey returned, and he saw by Catherine's face that the officer had been unsuccessful.

The audience was finished. The king rose with difficulty, saluted the ambassadors, and retired, leaning on Ambroise Paré, who, since his accident, had not quitted him an instant. The Duke d'Alençon had been a mere nobody throughout the ceremony; and Charles's eyes, which had been fixed on D'Anjou, had not once been turned towards him.

The new King of Poland felt himself lost. Carried off by those barbarians, far from his mother, he was, so to speak, a second Antæus, removed from the earth to which he owed his strength. Instead of following the king, he retired to his mother's apartments. On seeing her beloved son pale beneath the crown, and bending beneath the royal mantle. Catherine advanced towards him.

"Oh, mother!" cried the king, "I am condemned to die an exile."

"My son," returned Catherine, "have you so soon forgotten René's prediction? Tranquillize yourself; you will not be there long."

"Mother, I entreat you," said the Duke d'Anjou, "on the least probability of the crown of France being vacant, inform me."

"My son," replied the queen, "until the day we both of us await, a horse shall be always saddled in my stable, and a courier ever in my antechamber ready to set out for Poland."

CHAPTER XLIV.

ORESTES AND PYLADES.

HENRY D'ANJOU once departed, peace and happiness seemed to have returned to the Louvre. Charles, laying aside his melancholy, resumed his usually fine and vigorous health, either hunting each day with Henry, or, if prevented from following that sport, passing the time in discussing subjects relating to it, and scolding his brother-in-law for the indifference he betrayed for hawking, declaring that he would be the most accomplished prince of his time, if he did but understand the management of falcons, gerfalcons, hawks, and tiercelets, as perfectly as he did brocks and hounds. Catherine had returned to all the duties of a good mother. Kind and gentle towards Charles and D'Alençon—affectionate to Henry and Marguerite—gracious to Madame de Nevers andMadame de Sauve, she even carried her amiability so far as to visit Maurevel twice during the time he lay ill in his residence, situated Rue de la Cerisaie—alleging, as a reason for this condescension on her part, that the unfortunate object of her pity had been wounded while in the discharge of orders received from herself. Marguerite followed up her love affairs after the Italian mode of conducting such matters. Each evening she stood at her open window, and, both by writing and gestures, kept up a continual correspondence with La Mole; while, in each of his letters, the impatient young man reminded his lovely mistress of her promise to see him in the Rue Cloche-Percée.

In a word, there remained but one lonely and discontented person amidst the various members of the now calm and tranquil Louvre.

It was certainly something to know that La Mole still lived—much to be the object of decided preference to so charming and capricious a person as Madame de Nevers; but the Piedmontese would thankfully have surrendered all the tender meetings granted him by the duchess, as well as all the consolatory assurances of Marguerite touching the safety of their common friend, for one hour's enjoyment of his dear La Mole's company.

Urged by the wishes of her own heart, as well as by the supplications of La Mole, and the deep despair of the woe-begone Coconnas, Marguerite had appointed to meet Henriette at the house with the double entrance, and endeavor there to discuss, fully and uninterruptedly, those subjects all four had so much at heart.

Coconnas received Henriette's summons to be in the Rue Tizon at half-past nine with a very ill grace. Nevertheless, he was punctual to the assignation, where he found Henriette already arrived, and not a little offended at being there first.

"Fie, monsieur!" cried she, as he entered, "is this well, to make—I will not say a princess, but a lady—wait for you?"

"Wait?" replied Coconnas. "I like that! I'll wager you what you like, that we are before our time."

"I was here certainly before the time fixed."

"Well, and so was I, or, at least, I should have been, but for a circumstance. What's o'clock now? Scarcely ten, I think."

"And my letter named half-past nine as the hour you were to meet me here."

"For the purpose of being punctual, I quitted the Louvre at nine o'clock to repair hither; but when I reached the corner of the Rue de Grenelle, I perceived a person whom I mistook for La Mole."

"Always something tedious about that La Mole!"

"Certainly, either with your leave or without it."

"Brute!"

"Upon my word," said Coconnas, "we seem bent upon paying each other compliments to-night."

"You are really overpoweringly civil, it must be confessed; but go on with your story, if it must be so, and let me hear what became of your meeting with the individual so like your dear La Mole. But, stay! for heaven's sake, how comes this blood upon your doublet?"

"Ah, that fellow must have sprinkled me when we were fighting together."

"Have you, then, fought any one?"

"To be sure I have."

"And still on La Mole's account."

"For whom do you think I should fight? For a woman? No, no; I will tell you all about it. I followed the person who had dared to take upon himself to imitate the walk and manner of my friend, and overtook him in the Rue Coquillière. I eyed him in every way, by the light from a shop window —well, it was not my poor La Mole!"

"So far, so good!"

"Aye, but my unknown gentleman turned quite angry about my following him; and when I said, 'Sir, you are an ass and a fool to take upon yourself to bear a distant resemblance to my friend M. de la Mole, who is an accomplished cavalier, while it only requires a nearer view of you to perceive you are only a vulgarian!' he drew his sword—I did the same; and at the third pass, my angry gallant fell senseless at my feet sprinkling me with his blood in falling."

"And did you not afford him any succor?"

"Just as I was about to do so, another cavalier, but mounted on horseback, came by. Well, this time, duchess, I thought I was quite sure of finding La Mole, for he resembled him even more than the preceding—he was going a great pace, but that did not deter me from running after him as hard as I could; but I was obliged to stop to get a little breath, and, in the meantime, the horseman disappeared; and, tired and dispirited with having had so unsuccessful a chase, I determined to come here!"

"Upon my word," said the duchess, your conduct is most flattering! It is quite easy to perceive you no longer love me."

"On the contrary, duchess, I idolize you; but you do not understand the thing. Is it not quite possible for me to love and cherish and dote upon you, and yet employ my spare time in eulogizing my friend!"

"You call the moments passed with me spare time!"

"I can't help it: that poor De la Mole is forever in my thoughts!"

"And you prefer him to me! I see, I know you do! Annibal, I hate and detest you—there!—now I've said it. Why not deal candidly with me, and tell me you prefer this friend to me—only one thing I warn you—that if you dare to prefer any creature in the world to me, I'll—I'll——"

"Henriette, most lovely duchess! let me advise you, for the sake of your own tranquillity, not to ask unwise questions—be satisfied that I love you, best of women; but you must also permit me the privilege of loving La Mole above all other men."

"Well answered!" said a strange voice, suddenly, and a large damask curtain being raised, discovered a panel, which, sliding back into the wall, and forming a mode of communication between the two apartments, discovered La Mole standing in the doorway, like one of Titian's splendid paintings set in a gilded frame.

"La Mole!" exclaimed Coconnas, without taking the slightest notice of Marguerite, or in any way thanking her for the delightful surprise she had arranged for him; "La Mole! my friend! my dear, dear friend!"

So saying, he threw himself into his friend's arms, knocking over the table that stood in his way, as well as the armchair he had been sitting in.

La Mole returned his greetings with equal warmth; then, addressing the Duchess de Nevers: "You must pardon me, madame, if the mention of my name has been allowed to disturb your happiness; all I can say," continued he, regarding Marguerite with ineffable tenderness, "is, that it has not been my fault that we have not seen each other before this."

"You see, Henriette," said Marguerite, taking up the conversation, "I have kept my word; here he is!"

Meanwhile, Coconnas, after having embraced his friend, and walked round and round him a dozen times; after even holding a candelabra to his face, the better to gaze on his beloved features, suddenly turned towards Marguerite, and kneeling down reverentially, kissed the hem of her robe.

"Well, well!" said the Duchess de Nevers, "you seem to forget that I am present; I suppose I have grown quite unendurable in your eyes."

"*Mordi!*" replied Coconnas, "you are, as you ever have been, the goddess of my idolatry: the only difference being, that I can now tell you so with a lighter heart; and were a host of savage nations standing by, I would insist and maintain that all their hyperborean and barbarous countries together could produce nothing so perfect, so lovely, as you, my queen of beauty."

"Gently, gently, Coconnas," interposed La Mole; "do you forget that Madame Marguerite is here?"

"That makes no difference," answered Coconnas, with that half-serious, half-comic air and manner so peculiarly his own; "I will still assert that Madame Henriette is the queen of beauty, while Madame Marguerite is a beauty of a queen!"

"Come, then, my beautiful queen!" said Madame de Nevers, perceiving that Coconnas had neither eyes nor ears for any one but La Mole, "let us leave these tender friends to have an hour's chat together. M. Coconnas will perhaps be a little more rational after that."

Marguerite whispered a few words to La Mole, and then, with Madame de Nevers, passed through the open panel to the next room, where supper was awaiting them.

The two young men were then left alone.

The first questions asked by Coconnas were touching that fatal evening, which had well nigh cost him his life. In proportion as La Mole proceeded in his narration, the Piedmontese shook with intense emotion.

"And why?" inquired he, "instead of running about half wild as you have done, and causing me the uneasiness you have done, did you not seek refuge with our master the duke, who would have received and protected you?"

"Do you mean the Duke d'Alençon?" whispered La Mole, "when you say *our* master? 'Tis to the King of Navarre I owe my life."

"Excellent, noble king! but what part did the Duke d'Alençon play in the affair?"

"Oh, he held the cord with which I was to be strangled."

"*Mordi!*" exclaimed Coconnas, springing up with violent energy; "are you sure of that? What! a pale-faced, sickly-looking prince, a currish mongrel, dare to lay his hands on my friend!—Strangle him, indeed! ha ha! *mordi!* by to-morrow he shall hear my opinion on the subject."

"Are you mad, Coconnas? For Heaven's sake, calm yourself, and endeavor to recollect that it is half-past eleven o'clock, and that you are in waiting to-night at the Louvre."

"What care I for that? Good! he may wait long ere he has my attendance. What, do you suppose I will ever again serve a man who has held a cord to murder my friend with? You are jesting! No, no, the hand of Providence has reunited us, and from you I go no more. If you stay here, I remain also."

"For the love of Heaven, Coconnas, mind what you are about. You are sober, I trust?"

"Luckily I am, or I should most certainly set the Louvre on fire."

"Come, come, Annibal," persisted La Mole, "act like a reasonable being; return to your duties, or inform the duke that you quit his service."

"To be sure, to be sure; that is quite the right thing and I will do it. I'll write him a few lines directly."

"Write, Coconnas! you make light work of writing to a prince of the blood."

"Ah, but whose blood—that of my friend? Have a care!" exclaimed Coconnas, rolling his large fierce-looking eyes; "I may yet be tempted to break through etiquette beyond the mere sending of a written notice to quit his service."

So saying, Coconnas took the pen without further opposition from his friend, and hastily composed the following specimen of epistolary eloquence:

"MY LORD,—There can be no doubt but that a person versed as is your highness in the writings of all authors of classical antiquity, must be perfectly well acquainted with the touching story of Orestes and Pylades, two heroes celebrated alike for their misfortunes and deep friendship. My friend La Mole is equally unfortunate as was Orestes, while I can boast of the same devoted attachment as that which possessed Pylades. Affairs of the utmost importance to him demand my aid and assistance at this particular moment, and render it quite impossible for me to quit him. I am therefore compelled (craving your highness's pardon for the same) to take a holiday, for the purpose of remaining with the dear friend I mean to part from no more, but to follow his fortune whithersoever it may lead me.

"I beg your highness to believe the deep sorrow it causes me to withdraw myself from your service, as also the deep respect with which I subscribe myself, my lord,

"Your highness's
"Most humble and obedient servant,
"ANNIBAL, COMTE DE COCONNAS,
"And the inseparable friend of M. de la Mole."

This chef-d'œuvre terminated, Coconnas read it aloud to La Mole, who merely shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, what do you think of it?" inquired Coconnas, who either had not seen his friend's gesture, or feigned not to have done so.

"Why, I say that M. d'Alençon will laugh at us both, as a pair of simpletons."

"Better do that than strangle us. Now, then, I will speak to our host to get my letter despatched to the Louvre."

At this moment the panel was slid back.

"Well," inquired both princesses in the same breath; "and how are Pylades and Orestes, by this time?"

"*Mordi!* madame!" replied Coconnas, "they are both dying with love and hunger."

It was Maître la Hurière himself, who, at nine o'clock the following morning, carried to the Louvre the respectful missive of Comte Annibal de Coconnas.

CHAPTER XLV.

ORTHON.

HENRY OF NAVARRE, after the refusal of the Duke d'Alençon, which left everything undecided and in peril, even his very existence, had become, if possible, more intimate with the prince than he had been before: from which circumstance Catherine concluded that not only did the two princes understand each other perfectly well, but also that they were engaged in some mutual plot or conspiracy.

She questioned Marguerite on the subject, but Marguerite was worthy of her mother; and so skilfully did the Queen of Navarre parry her mother's inquisitorial inquiries, that although replying with apparent openness and candor to each, she contrived to throw a still greater mystery over the affair than it was before involved in.

The Florentine had thus no guide through the labyrinth of her thoughts but the spirit of intrigue she had brought with her from Tuscany; and the first conclusion she came to was, that as the hated Béarnais derived the principal part of his strength from his alliance with the Duke d'Alençon, it would be expedient to separate them as speedily as possible.

From the instant in which she formed this resolution, Catherine continued to beset her son with a patience and ability worthy of the most indefatigable angler, who, having dropped his bait near the prey he desires to secure, instantly draws it ashore, till his victim is unconsciously lured into his power.

Duke François was conscious of the increased affection shown him by his mother, whose advances he received with every manifestation of pleasure. As for Henry, he affected to know nothing of what was going on, but he kept a more watchful eye on his ally than he had hitherto done.

Everybody seemed to await some great event by which to shape their course. During this state of things it was, that one fine summer day, when the sun had risen with even more than wonted splendor, and the rich balmy air was filled with the odor of a thousand flowers, a pale and sickly looking man came forth from a small house situated behind the Arsenal, and feebly dragged his way, supporting himself by a staff, towards the Rue de Petit-Musc.

Having reached the Porte St.-Antoine, he diverged from the Boulevard and entered the Archery Garden; the man who kept the gate receiving him with every demonstration of respect.

No person was in the garden, which (as its name expressed, belonged to a society called the Toxophilites), but had there been ever so many spectators, the pale stranger would have well merited their commiseration and sympathy; for his long mustache and military air and step, though somewhat weakened by sickness and suffering, sufficiently indicated that he was some officer recently wounded, and now seeking to regain his strength by essaying to take exercise in the open air. Yet strange to say, when the cloak with which (spite of the increasing warmth) the apparently harmless visitant was clad flew open, it displayed a pair of long pistols hanging to the silver clasps of his belt, which also sustained a dagger and a sword of colossal size, the latter of which hung heavily at his side, and, with its ponderous sheath, clattered against his shrunken and trembling legs.

Arrived in the garden, the individual selected for his resting-place a sort of small covered arbor looking on to the Boulevards, from which it was only separated by a thick hedge and by a small ditch, which formed as it were a second enclosure. Extending his weary limbs on a turfy bank, within reach of a table, he beckoned the porter, who, in addition to the duties of concierge, exercised also the vocation of a vintner, and saying a few words, was quickly supplied with what appeared to be a species of cordial.

The invalid had been about ten minutes in his shady retreat, slowly discussing the draught brought to him by the concierge, when suddenly his countenance, spite of its interesting pallor, assumed a fearful expression. He had just detected the approach of a cavalier, who, turning quickly round the corner of a street, advanced, wrapped in a large cloak, and stopped just before his eyes. Scarcely had the pale stranger in the arbor (who was no other than Maurevel) a little recovered from the agitation occasioned by the unexpected presence of the cavalier, than he observed that the latter was joined by a second person, dressed in the garb of a page.

Concealed beneath his leafy bower, Maurevel could see and hear all that passed in a conversation, the importance of which may be imagined, when it is known that the cavalier in the cloak was De Mouy, and the young man Orthon the page.

Both looked carefully around them, while Maurevel held his breath, lest a sound should escape him.

"You may speak now in safety," said the younger and more confident of the two: "we are quite secure here; none can either see or hear us."

"'Tis well!" answered De Mouy. "Now attend! you are to go to Madame de Sauve's, and should she be at home, give this into her own hands; but if she be not in her apartments, then place the letter where the king is accustomed to deposit his—behind the mirror. Wait at the Louvre; and if any reply is sent, bring it, you know where. Should you not be charged with an answer, then meet me to-night, with a petronel, at the spot I pointed out to you, and which I have just left."

"Enough!" said Orthon; "I understand."

"I must now leave you," continued De Mouy: "I have much to do during the day. It will be useless for you to go to the Louvre till *he* is there; and I have every reason to believe *he* will be engaged all day studying hawking; so be gone, my boy, and execute your bidding: fear not to show yourself at the Louvre: you can say that, being now quite recovered, you come to thank Madame de Sauve for the kind care she took of you during your illness."

Maurevel, with fixed gaze, continued to listen till the perspiration gathered in large drops on his forehead. His first impulse had been to detach one of the pistols from his belt, and take deadly aim at De Mouy, but at that instant the sudden opening of the latter's cloak displayed a cuirass firm and solid enough to resist all such futile attempts.

Then, again, he reflected, that merely separated by so slight a barrier, one spring would bring De Mouy on him; and what chance could a poor wounded, enfeebled being like himself have with so powerful an assailant?—with a sigh, therefore, he drew back the weapon, mentally exclaiming:

"How unfortunate that I cannot stretch him dead on the spot, without any other witness than that young varlet, who would have served as a capital mark for my second pistol!"

Then, on the other hand, it occurred to him that the billet sent by the page to Madame de Sauve might probably be better worth taking than the life of the Huguenot chief.

"Well," said he, "be it so, then; you escape me this morning, but to-morrow I will settle all scores with you, if I pursue you to that hell from which you have sprung to ruin *me*, unless I first destroy *you!*"

At this instant, De Mouy, folding his cloak around him, and concealing his features in its large folds, departed in the direction of the Temple, while Orthon took the road that conducted to the banks of the river.

Then Maurevel, rising with more of energy and vigor than he had ventured to reckon on, regained the Rue de la Cerisaie, caused a horse to be saddled, and, weak as he was and at the risk of again opening his newly-closed wounds, he set off at full gallop towards the Rue Saint-Antoine, reached the quays, and darted into the Louvre.

Five minutes after he had passed the wicket, Catherine was in full possession of all that had transpired, and Maurevel had received the thousand golden crowns promised him for the arrest of the King of Navarre.

"Yes—yes!" exclaimed Catherine, exultingly, "either I am much deceived, or De Mouy will turn out the black spot discovered by René in the horoscope of this detested Béarnais."

A quarter of an hour after De Maurevel, Orthon reached the Louvre, and having fearlessly shown himself, as directed by De Mouy, proceeded, unmolested, to the apartments of Madame de Sauve, where he found only Dariole, who informed him that her lady was occupied, by the queen's orders, in transcribing letters for her majesty, who had summoned her for that purpose within the last five minutes.

"It does not signify," replied Orthon; "I can wait." Then, profiting by the freedom he had always been permitted to observe, he went into the adjoining chamber, which was the sleeping-room of the baroness, and after assuring himself that he was unobserved, carefully deposited the billet behind the looking-glass. Just as he was withdrawing his hand from the mirror, Catherine entered the room. Orthon changed color, for he fancied the quick, searching glance of the queen-mother was first directed to the glass.

"What are you doing here, my little fellow?" asked Catherine; "seeking for Madame de Sauve, I suppose?"

"Yes, indeed, your majesty; it is a long time since I saw her, and if I delay returning her my grateful thanks, I fear she will think me ungrateful."

"You love Madame de Sauve, then, very much, do you not?"

"Oh, that I do, with all my heart! I can never forget the kindness Madame de Sauve condescended to bestow on a humble servitor like myself."

"And upon what occasion was it that she showed you all this care and attention?" inquired Catherine, feigning to be ignorant of what had befallen the youth.

"When I was wounded, madame, the night that they tried to arrest the King of Navarre. I was so terrified at the sight of the soldiers, that I called out for help, upon which one of them gave me a blow on the head, and I fell senseless to the ground."

"Poor child! and you are now quite recovered?"

"Oh, quite, madame!"

"And that being the case," continued Catherine, "I suppose you are trying to get back into the service of the King of Navarre?"

"No, indeed, madame; when the King of Navarre learned that I had presumed to resist your majesty's orders, he dismissed me in heavy displeasure."

"Really!" said Catherine, with a tone expressive of the deepest interest. "Well, I will take the arrangement of that affair into my own hands; but if you are looking for Madame de Sauve, you will do so in vain; she is at this moment busily occupied in my apartments, and likely to be detained much longer over her employment."

Then, thinking that Orthon might not have had time to place his billet behind the glass previous to her entrance, she returned to the adjoining chamber, in order to afford the requisite opportunity for his so doing.

But just as Orthon, uneasy at the unexpected arrival of the queen-mother, was asking himself whether the circumstance did not in some way forebode evil to his master, he heard three gentle taps against the ceiling, the very signal he was in the habit of using to warn his master of the approach of danger during his visits to Madame de Sauve.

He started at the sound : a sudden light seemed to break in upon his mind, and he appropriated the warning to himself—danger was near, doubtless ; and hastily springing towards the mirror, he withdrew the paper he had previously placed there.

Through a rent in the tapestried hangings, Catherine watched every movement of the youth ; she saw him dart forward to the mirror, but whether to take away or to conceal the coveted paper, she could not detect. Returning to the apartment, with a smiling countenance, she said :

"What, here still, my little man ? What can you be waiting for ?—did I not promise to take charge of your future prospects ? Do you doubt my word ?"

"Heaven forfend, madame !" replied Orthon, bowing low ; then kneeling before the queen, he kissed the hem of her robe, and hastily quitted the room. As he went out, he observed the captain of the guards, waiting the orders of Catherine, in the antechamber. This was far from calming his apprehensions ; on the contrary, it increased the vague terror under which he already labored.

Immediately the folds of the massy curtain which hung before the door had closed on the form of Orthon, Catherine darted into the chamber, where she expected to find the so-ardently-desired billet ; but vainly did she thrust her eager hand behind the mirror ; no paper of any kind was there. Again she shook the solid frame, tapped against the glass, looked diligently around, to see if aught had fallen. All her impatient research availed not—no letter could she find. Yet her eyes had not deceived her : she had distinctly seen the youth approach the mirror ; but doubtless the action she witnessed was to repossess himself of his deposit—not to place his billet.

"Unhappy boy !" cried she ; "what evil destiny urged you thus to attempt to measure strength with me. I had rather not have been your enemy, as I now must be. Ho ! there, M. de Nancey !"

The sonorous voice of the queen traversed the salon, and penetrated even to the ante-room, where M. de Nancey awaited her orders.

At the sound of his name, thus pronounced, the captain of the guards lost not an instant in obeying the summons.

"What is your majesty's pleasure?" said he, on entering.

"Did you but now observe a youth—nay, a mere child—go hence?"

"I did, madame."

"Call him back."

"By what name shall I address him?"

"By that of Orthon. Should he refuse to return, bring him back by force, but do not alarm him, if he comes unresistingly. I must speak with him directly."

The captain of the guards rushed out to obey the queen.

Orthon had scarcely got half way down-stairs, when he heard himself called, and a cold shudder seized him, for he guessed who had sent for him.

His first impulse was to fly, but with an accuracy of judgment above his years, he quickly perceived that flight would be certain ruin. He therefore stopped, and inquired:

"Who calls me?"

"I do—M. de Nancey," replied the captain of the guards, hurriedly descending the stairs.

"But I am in a very great hurry, and cannot stay," replied Orthon.

"By order of her majesty the queen-mother, I command you to accompany me back."

The terrified boy wiped the perspiration from his brow, and followed M. de Nancey back to the apartments of Madame de Sauve.

As Orthon entered the apartment where the queen-mother awaited, he trembled, and a deathly paleness came over him. The poor boy was as yet too young to exercise a more practised control over himself. "Your majesty," said he, with a palpitating heart, "has done me the honor to recall me—may I presume to inquire for what purpose?"

"Child!" answered Catherine, with a bright and encouraging smile, "your countenance pleases me, and having promised to interest myself in your welfare, I am desirous of so doing without any delay; but first tell me, are you able to ride well?"

"Oh, yes, madame!"

"'Tis well; then come to me in my closet, and I will give you a message to carry to St-Germains."

"I am at your majesty's commands."

"Then order a horse to be prepared, M. de Nancey."

The captain of the guards disappeared on his errand.

"Now then, boy!" said Catherine, leading the way and signing for Orthon to follow her.

The queen-mother descended a floor, then entered the corridor in which were situated the apartments of the Duke d'Alençon and the king, reached the winding staircase, again descended a flight of stairs, and opened a door leading to a circular gallery, of which none but the king and herself possessed the key, made Orthon pass first; then, entering after him, carefully locked the door. This gallery formed a sort of rampart round a portion of the apartments occupied by the king and queen-mother, and resembled the corridor of the Castle of St. Angelo, at Rome, or that of the Pitti Palace at Florence, destined to serve as a place of refuge in case of danger.

The door secured, Catherine and her companion found themselves enclosed in a dark corridor. Each advanced a few steps; the queen leading the way and the page following, when suddenly Catherine turned round, and Orthon perceived on her countenance the same gloomy expression it had worn a few minutes previously. Her eyes, of the shape and color of the cat or panther, seemed to dart forth sparks of fire.

"Stop!" cried she.

Poor Orthon felt a cold shiver pervade his frame, while the damp, chill air of that unfrequented spot seemed to cling around him like an icy mantle. The ground he trod upon seemed to re-echo the dull moaning of a tomb. All this, combined with the fierce, penetrating look of Catherine, and his own uneasy fears, proved too much for the page, who sunk nearly paralyzed against the walls of this fearful spot.

"Where," said the queen-mother, fixing on him her sharp, intimidating glance, "is the billet you were desired to give to the King of Navarre?"

"The billet?" stammered Orthon.

"Aye, the billet—which, in the event of not finding the king, you were instructed to place behind the mirror."

"Indeed, madame," said Orthon, "I know not what your majesty alludes to."

"Nay, I but ask for the billet given you by M. de Mouy, about an hour since, behind the Archery Garden."

"Your majesty is wholly mistaken or misinformed," answered Orthon; "I have no billet of any kind."

"'Tis false!" said Catherine. "Give me that letter, and I will perform the promise I have made you."

"Indeed, indeed, madame, I have no billet to give up."

Catherine began to lose all patience. She ground her teeth with rage; then suddenly checking herself, and assuming a bland smile, she said:

"Come, come, foolish boy, surrender that useless paper, and a thousand golden crowns shall be your reward."

"But how can I give you what I do not possess? Please your majesty to credit me; I have no such billet in my keeping."

"You shall have two thousand crowns!"

"Nay, gracious madame, since I have nothing to give, I cannot give it."

"Say *ten* thousand crowns!"

Orthon, who, young as he was, could plainly perceive the rising anger of the queen, decided that the only chance remaining of preserving his master's secret was to swallow the disputed billet. With this design, he attempted to take it from his pocket, but the quick eye of Catherine divined his intention and stayed his purpose.

"There, there, my child!" said she, laughing, "that will do. Your fidelity, it seems, is above all temptation. Well—when royalty would secure to itself a faithful follower, it is requisite to try the devotedness of the heart it would attach. I now know what opinion to form of your zeal and faithfulness. Take this purse, in earnest of my future bounty, and carry the billet to your master, with an intimation that, after to-day, I take you into my service. You may now depart: you can let yourself out by the door we entered at—it opens from within."

So saying, Catherine placed a heavily-filled purse in the hands of the astonished youth, and then walked on a few steps, placing her hand against the wall.

"Thanks, gracious madame!" murmured Orthon. "Then you are good enough to pardon me all I have done to displease you?"

"Nay, more; I reward you as a faithful bearer of billets-doux—a pleasing messenger of love! One only fault I find with you; you forget that your master is waiting for you."

"True!" said the youth, springing towards the door.

But scarcely had he advanced two or three steps, than the ground gave way beneath his feet. He stumbled, extended his hands, with a fearful cry, and disappeared in one of those horrible oubliettes of the Louvre of which Catherine had just touched the spring.

"Now, then," said Catherine, "thanks to this fool's obstinacy, I shall have nearly two hundred stairs to descend!"

The Florentine then returned to her apartments, from whence she took a dark lantern; then returning to the gallery, closed the spring, and opened the door of a spiral staircase, which seemed as though contrived to penetrate into the very bowels of the earth. Proceeding along the windings of this descent, she reached a second door, which, revolving on its hinges, admitted to the depths of the oubliette, where—crushed, bleeding, and mutilated, by a fall of more than one hundred feet—lay the still palpitating form of poor Orthon; while, on the other side of the wall forming the barrier of this dreadful spot, the waters of the Seine were heard to ripple by, brought by a species of subterraneous filtration to the foot of the staircase.

Having reached the damp and unwholesome abyss, which during her reign had witnessed numerous similar scenes to that now enacted, Catherine proceeded to search the corpse, eagerly drew forth the desired billet, ascertained by the lantern that it was the one she sought, then pushing the mangled body from her, she pressed a spring, the bottom of the oubliette sank down, and the corpse, borne by its own weight, disappeared towards the river.

Closing the door after her, she reascended; and returning to her closet, read the paper poor Orthon had so valiantly defended. It was conceived in these words:

"This evening at ten o'clock, Rue de l'Arbre-Sec, *Hôtel de la belle Etoile.* Should you come, no reply is requisite; if otherwise, send word back, *No,* by the bearer.

"De MOUY DE SAINT-PHALE."

As Catherine read these words, a smile of triumph curled her lip. She thought only of the victory she had gained, without once considering the price she had purchased it at.

And after all, what was Orthon? Merely a faithful, devoted follower; a young, a handsome, and noble-minded youth. Nothing more!

The billet read, Catherine immediately returned to the apartments of Madame de Sauve, and placed it behind the mirror. As she returned, she found the captain of the guards in the corridor, awaiting her further commands.

"Madame," said M. de Nancey, "according to your majesty's orders the horse has been duly prepared."

"Ah, indeed!" said Catherine. "But we shall not need the horse you have prepared. Upon questioning the youth, I find he is not sufficiently intelligent to be entrusted with the message I designed to send by him. I have therefore made him a little present, and dismissed him by the small side-wicket."

"But," persisted M. de Nancey, "your majesty's commission?"

"What commission?" asked Catherine.

"That which your majesty proposed accomplishing by means of this youth. Will it please you that I go myself, or send one of my men to do your royal command?"

"No," said Catherine; "both you and your men, M. de Nancey, will have other work this evening."

And Catherine returned to her apartments, in full hope and expectation of holding the detested King of Navarre in her power ere the morrow's sun had risen.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE HOSTELRY OF "LA BELLE ETOILE."

Two hours after the event we have described, Madame de Sauve, having completed her attendance on the queen, entered her apartments; Henry followed her; and Dariole having informed him that Orthon had been, he went to the glass, and took the billet.

It was, as we have seen, couched in these terms:

"This evening at ten o'clock, Rue de l'Arbre-Sec, *Hôtel de la Belle Etoile*. Should you come, no reply is requisite; if otherwise, send word back, *No*, by the bearer.

"DE MOUY DE SAINT-PHALE."

There was no address upon it.

"Henry is certain to go," had thought Catherine; "for even did he not wish it, he cannot find the bearer to tell him so."

Catherine was right; Henry inquired after Orthon. Dariole told him he had gone out with the queen-mother; but Henry felt no uneasiness, as he knew Orthon was incapable of betraying him.

He dined, as he was accustomed, at the king's table, who rallied him upon the mistakes he had made that morning in hawking. Henry excused himself, alleging he dwelt on the mountains, and not in the plains; but he promised Charles to learn the noble art better.

Catherine was in an excellent humor; and when she rose from table, requested Marguerite to pass the evening with her.

At eight o'clock, Henry took two of his gentlemen, went out by the Porte St. Honoré, entered again by the Tour de Bois, crossed the Seine at the ferry of the Nesle, mounted the Rue Saint-Jacques, and there dismissed them, as if he were going to an amorous rendezvous. At the corner of the Rue des Mathurins he found a man on horseback, wrapped in a large cloak: he approached him.

"Mantes!" said the man.

"Pau!" replied the king.

The horseman instantly dismounted. Henry wrapped himself in his splashed mantle, sprang on his steed, rode down the Rue de la Harpe, crossed the Pont St. Michel, passed the Rue Barthelemy, crossed the river again on the Pont au Meunier, descended the quays, reached the Rue de l'Arbre-Sec, and knocked at Maître la Hurière's.

La Mole was in a little chamber, writing a long love-letter; to whom may be easily imagined,

Coconnas was in the kitchen, watching half a dozen partridges roasting, and disputing with La Hurière as to whether they were done or not.

At this moment Henry knocked, Gregoire went to take his horse, and the traveler entered, stamping on the floor as if to warm his feet.

"Eh!" said La Mole, continuing to write; "La Hurière, here is a gentleman wants you."

La Hurière advanced, and looked at Henry; and as his large cloak did not inspire him with very great veneration:

"Who are you?" asked he.

"Eh, *sang Dieu!*" returned Henry, pointing to La Mole. "I am, as the gentleman told you, a Gascon gentleman come to court."

"What do you want?"

'A room and supper."

"I do not let a room to any one, unless he has a lackey."

"Oh, but I will pay you a rose noble for your room and supper."

"You are very generous, worthy sir," said La Hurière, with some distrust.

"No; but expecting to sup here, I invited a friend of mine to meet me. Have you any good wine of Artois?"

"I have as good as Henry of Navarre drinks."

"Ah, good! Here is my friend."

As he spoke, the door opened, and a gentleman somewhat older than the first, and having a long rapier at his side, entered.

"Ah, ah," said he, "you are exact, my young friend. It is something for a man who has traveled two hundred leagues to be so punctual."

"Is this your guest?" asked La Hurière.

"Yes," replied the first, shaking hands with the young man with the rapier.

"Maître," said La Mole to La Hurière, "free us from these Huguenot fellows; Coconnas and I cannot converse together whilst they are there."

"Carry the supper into No. 2, on the third floor," said La Hurière. "Up-stairs, gentlemen."

The two travelers followed Gregoire, who lighted them.

Coconnas watched them until they disappeared, and then came close to La Mole.

"Did you see them?"

"Aye, truly."

"And who are they?"

"How should I know?"

"I'd swear they are Henry of Navarre, and the man in the scarlet mantle."

"Aye, perhaps so."

"Well, you may rely on it, there is some plot going on."

"Oh, no; some love intrigue."

"Bah! no such thing. However, I do not belong to the Duke d'Alençon now—so I care not. Let's go to supper."

Meantime Henry and De Mouy were installed in their chamber.

"Well, sire," said De Mouy, "have you seen Orthon?"

"No; but I found his billet. I suppose he was frightened, for the queen saw him. I had some fear about him; for Dariole told me the queen had a long conversation with him."

"Oh, there is no danger; he is very quick-witted. I will venture to say the queen did not learn much from him."

"Have you seen him yourself?"

"No; but he will come this evening to fetch me, armed with a good petronel; and he can tell us what passed as we walk along."

"That is right; besides, La Mole is on the watch down-stairs, and should anything occur, he will give us notice."

"Well! what says M. d'Alençon?"

"He will not go; he says so distinctly. The departure of D'Anjou, and the king's illness, have made him alter his mind."

"It is he who has spoilt our plan?"

"Yes."

"It was he betrayed us?"

"No; but he is ready to do so on the first opportunity."

"Coward! traitor!—why did he not answer my letters?"

"In order to have proofs against you, and that you should have none against him. Meantime, all is then lost; is it not so, De Mouy?"

"On the contrary, won: you know all the party, except De Condé's fraction, were for you, and only used D'Alençon as a safeguard. Since the day of the ceremony I have arranged everything. I shall have fifteen hundred horse ready in a week; they will be posted on the road to Pau; they will surely suffice?"

Henry smiled, and laid his hand on his friend's shoulder.

"De Mouy," said he, "you, and you alone, know the King of Navarre is not such a coward as men think."

"I know it, sire; and I trust ere long all France will know it too. When do you hunt again?"

"In a week or ten days."

"Well, everything seems quiet now. No one thinks of the Duke d'Anjou; the king gets better every day; the persecution against us has ceased. Play the amiable with the queen-mother and M. d'Alençon; tell the duke you cannot go without him, and try and make him believe you."

"Oh, he shall believe me!"

"Has he such confidence in you?"

"Not in me, but in the queen."

"And is the queen true to us?"

"I have ample proofs of it; besides, she is ambitious."

"Well, three days before you hunt, tell me where it will be—at Bondy, at St. Germain's, or at Rambouillet. When you see La Mole, spur on—follow him; once out of the forest, they must have fleet steeds to overtake us."

"Agreed."

"Have you money, sire?"

Henry made the same grimace he made all his life at the same question.

"Not much," said he; "but I believe Margot has."

"Well, bring all you can with you. Orthon tells me he saw that scoundrel Maurevel, whom René has cured, walking about the Arsenal."

"Ah, I understand."

"You will be king some day, and will avenge yourself as a king; I am a soldier, and avenge myself as one. When all my affairs are arranged, which will be in five or six days, I will walk around the Arsenal myself, and after giving him two or three rapier thrusts, I shall quit Paris."

"Do as you will. Ah! what do you think of La Mole?"

"A charming fellow—brave and faithful."

"And discreet; he must follow us, and then I must think of his reward."

As Henry pronounced these words, the door flew open, and La Mole rushed in.

"Quick! quick!" cried he, "the house is surrounded."

"Surrounded!" said Henry, "by whom?"

"By the king's guards."

"Oh," said De Mouy, drawing two pistols from his belt, "battle, then!"

"What can you do against fifty men?" said La Mole.

"He is right," said the king, "and if there were any means of retreat——"

"I know one," said La Mole, "if your majesty will follow me."

"And De Mouy——"

"Can follow us; but you must be quick."

Steps were heard on the stairs.

"It is too late," said Henry.

"If you could occupy them five minutes," said La Mole, "I could save the king."

"I will occupy them," said De Mouy.

"But what will you do?"

"Oh, do not fear for me!"

And De Mouy rapidly concealed the king's plate, goblet, and napkin, so that it might seem he had supped alone.

"Come, sire—come!" cried La Mole.

"My brave De Mouy," said Henry.

De Mouy seized his hand, kissed it, pushed the door to the instant they were outside, and bolted it.

"Quick—quick, sire!" said La Mole, "they are on the stairs!"

At this moment, the torches were visible on the stairs, and the rattling of arms was heard.

La Mole guided the king in the darkness, and conducting him two stories higher, opened a door, which he then secured, and opening the window:

"Does your majesty fear an excursion on the roofs?" said he.

"I, a chamois hunter!"

"Follow me, and I will guide you."

And, getting out of the window, La Mole clambered along the ridge, then passed along a gully formed by two roofs, at the end of which was the open window of a garret.

"Here we are," said La Mole.

"So much the better," returned Henry, wiping the perspiration from his brow.

"Now, then," continued La Mole, "this garret communicates with a staircase, and the staircase with the street. I traveled the road on a more terrible night than this."

"Go on—go on!"

La Mole sprang into the open window, opened the door, and placing the cord that served as a baluster in Henry's hand:

"Come, sire," said he.

Henry had stopped before a window opposite the *Belle Etoile;* the stairs were crowded with armed soldiers, bearing torches. Suddenly, the king saw a group descend the stairs, with De Mouy in the midst; he had surrendered his sword, and walked quietly on.

"Brave De Mouy!" said the king.

"*Ma foi!* sire, he seems very composed, and even laughs; he meditates some plan, for he seldom smiles."

"All is well, then," replied Henry. "Let us regain the Louvre."

"Nothing easier; wrap yourself in your mantle, for the street is full of people, and we shall pass for spectators."

They both gained the Rue d'Averon, but in passing by the Rue des Pouliés, they saw De Mouy and his escort cross the place Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois.

"Ah!" said Henry, "they are taking him to the Louvre. *Diable!* the wicket will be closed; they will take the name of every one who enters, and I shall be suspected of having been with him."

"Well, sire," replied La Mole, "there's the Queen of Navarre's window."

"*Mon Dieu!* I did not think of that. But how shall I attract her attention?"

"Oh," said La Mole, bowing with an air of respectful gratitude, "your majesty throws stones so well."

CHAPTER XLVII.

DE MOUY DE SAINT-PHALE.

This time Catherine had taken her precautions so well, that she believed herself sure of her object.

Consequently, about ten o'clock, she had sent away Marguerite, quite convinced that the Queen of Navarre was ignorant of the plot against her husband, and went to the king.

Puzzled by the air of triumph which, in spite of her habitual dissimulation, appeared on his mother's countenance, Charles questioned Catherine, who only said:

"I can make but one reply to your majesty, and that is, you will this evening be delivered from two of your bitterest enemies."

Charles lowered his eyebrows, like a man who says to himself: "This is well—we shall see;" and whistled his tall boar-hound, who came to him, dragging his belly along the ground like a serpent, and, placing his fine and intelligent head on his master's knee, crouched.

After a few minutes, which Catherine passed with her eyes fixed and ears attentive, there was suddenly heard the noise of a pistol-shot in the courtyard of the Louvre.

"What noise is that?" inquired Charles, with a frown, whilst the hound rose up and pricked his ears.

"Nothing," Catherine replied, "it was only a signal."

"And what is the meaning of that signal?"

"It means that, from this moment, sire, your only, your real enemy is unable any longer to injure you."

"Have they been killing a man?" inquired Charles, looking at his mother with that eye of command which signified that assassination and mercy are two inherent attributes of royal power.

"No, sire, they have only arrested two."

"Oh," murmured Charles, "always hidden plots, conspiracies against the king. *Mort diable!* mother, I am an oldish boy, big enough to take care of myself, and want neither leading-strings nor swaddling-clothes. Go into Poland with your son Henry, if you desire to reign; but here you are wrong, I tell you, to play the game you do."

"My son," replied Catherine, "this is the last time I meddle with your affairs; but the enterprise was commenced long since, in which you have always said I was wrong, whilst I have labored to prove I was right."

At this moment M. de Nancey begged an audience of the king, and there was a noise of footsteps in the vestibule, and the butts of muskets clattered on the floor.

"Let M. de Nancey enter," said the king, hastily.

M. de Nancey entered, saluted the king, and then, turning to the queen-mother, said:

"Madame, your orders are executed; he is taken."

"What do you mean by *he?*" cried Catherine, much troubled; "have you only arrested one?"

"He was alone, madame."

"Did he defend himself?"

"No, he was supping quietly in a room, and handed his sword the moment it was demanded."

"Who is he?" asked the king.

"You will see," said Catherine. 'Bring in the prisoner, M. de Nancey."

De Mouy was introduced.

"De Mouy!" exclaimed the king; "what is the matter now?"

"If, sire," said De Mouy, with perfect composure, "your majesty would allow me that liberty, I would ask the same question."

"Instead of asking this question of the king," said Catherine, "have the kindness, M. de Mouy, to tell my son who was the man who was in the chamber of the King of Navarre on a certain night, and who, on that night, resisted the king's orders, like a rebel as he is, killed two of the guards, and wounded M. de Maurevel."

"Yes," said Charles, frowning; "do you know the name of that man, M. de Mouy?"

"I do, sire; does your majesty desire to know it?"

"Yes, it would give me pleasure, I confess."

"Well, sire, he is called De Mouy de Saint-Phale."

"It was you, then?"

"It was, sire."

Catherine, astonished at this audacity, recoiled before the young man.

"What!" inquired Charles IX., "dared you resist the orders of the king?"

"In the first place, sire, I was ignorant that there was an order of your majesty; then I saw only one thing, or rather but one man, M. de Maurevel, the assassin of my father, the assailant of the admiral. I remembered that it was a year and a half since, in the very chamber in which we now are, on the evening of the 24th of August, your majesty had promised me to do us justice on this murderer, and as since that time very grave events had occurred, I thought that perchance the king had been, in spite of himself, turned away from his desires; seeing Maurevel within my reach, I believed heaven had sent him there. Your majesty knows the rest, sire; I struck him down as a murderer, and fired at his men as robbers."

Charles made no reply; his friendship for Henry had made him view many things in another point of view than he had at first seen them.

The queen-mother, in reference to Saint Bartholemew, had set down in her memory observations which had fallen from her son, very much resembling remorse.

"But," observed the queen-mother, "what were you doing at that hour in the King of Navarre's apartments?"

"Oh," said De Mouy, "it is a long story to tell, but if his majesty has the patience to listen——"

"Yes," replied Charles, "I should wish to hear it."

"I will obey, sire," said De Mouy, bowing.

Catherine sat down, fixing an uneasy look on the young chief.

"We will listen," said Charles. "Here, Actæon!"

The dog resumed the place he had occupied before the prisoner had come in.

"Sire," said De Mouy, "I came to his majesty the King of Navarre as the deputy of our brethren, your faithful subjects of the Reformed religion——"

Catherine made a sign to Charles IX.

"Be quiet, madame," he said; "I do not lose a word. Go on, M. de Mouy; go on."

"To inform the King of Navarre," continued De Mouy, "that his abjuration had lost for him the confidence of the Huguenot party, but that, nevertheless, in remembrance of his father, Antony de Bourbon, and especially out of regard for the memory of his mother, the courageous Jeanne d'Albret, whose name is dear amongst us, the chiefs of the Reformed religion thought it a mark of deference due to him, to beg him to desist from his claims to the crown of Navarre."

"What said he?" asked Catherine, unable, in spite of her self-control, to receive this enexpected blow without wincing a little.

"Ah! ah!" said Charles, "but this crown of Navarre which, without my permission, was made thus to jump from head to head, seems to belong a little to me."

"The Huguenots, sire, recognize better than any one the principle of sovereignty which your majesty has just enunciated, and therefore hope to induce your majesty to place the crown on some head which is dear to you."

"I!" said Charles; "on a head which is dear to me!—*mort diable!* of what head, then, do you speak, sir? I do not understand you."

"Of the head of the Duke d'Alençon."

Catherine became as pale as death, and her eyes glared fiercely on De Mouy.

"And did my brother D'Alençon know this?"

"Yes, sire."

"And accepted the crown?"

"Subject to your majesty's consent, to which he referred us."

"Ah! ah!" said Charles, "it is, indeed, a crown which would suit our brother D'Alençon wonderfully well! And that I should never have thought of it! Thanks, De

Mouy—thanks! when you have such ideas you will always be welcome at the palace."

"Sire, you would long since have been informed of all this, but for the unfortunate affair of the Louvre, which made me fear that I had fallen into disgrace with your majesty."

"Yes; but," asked Catherine, "what said the King of Navarre to this proposal?"

"The king, madame, yielded to the desire of his brethren, and his renunciation was ready."

"In this case," cried Catherine, "you must have that renunciation."

"I have, madame," said De Mouy; "and by chance I have it about me, signed by him, and dated."

"Of a date anterior to the affair in the Louvre?" inquired Catherine.

"Yes, of the previous evening, I think."

And De Mouy drew from his pocket a renunciation in favor of the Duke d'Alençon, written and signed in Henry's hand, and bearing the date assigned to it.

"*Ma foi!* yes," said Charles, "and all is in due form."

"And what did Henry demand in return for this renunciation?"

"Nothing, madame; the friendship of the King Charles, he said to us, would amply repay him for the loss of a crown."

Catherine bit her lips in anger, and wrung her beautiful hands.

"This is all as complete as possible, De Mouy," added the king.

"Then," asked the queen-mother, "if all was settled between you and the King of Navarre, for what purpose did you seek an interview with him this evening?"

"I madame! with the King of Navarre?" said De Mouy. "He who arrested me will bear testimony that I was alone. Will your majesty call him?"

"M. de Nancey," said the king, and the captain of the guards entered.

"M. de Nancey," said Catherine, quickly, "was M. de Mouy quite alone at the hostelry of the *Belle Etoile*?"

"In the chamber, yes, madame: in the hostelry, no."

"Ah!" said Catherine, "who was his companion?"

"I know not if he were the companion of M. de Mouy, madame; but I know he escaped by a back door, after having prostrated two of my guards."

"And you recognized this gentleman, no doubt."

"I did not, but the guards did."

"And who was he?" inquired Charles IX.

"M. the Count Annibal de Coconnas."

"Annibal de Coconnas!" repeated the king, gloomy and reflective. "He who made so terrible a slaughter of the Huguenots during the St. Bartholomew?"

"M. de Coconnas, gentleman of the Duke d'Alençon," replied De Nancey.

"Good! good!" said Charles. "You may withdraw, M. de Nancey; and another time, remember one thing."

"What is that, sire?"

"That you are in my service, and will take your orders from no one but myself."

M. de Nancey retired backwards, bowing most respectfully. De Mouy smiled ironically at Catherine.

There was a brief silence. The queen pulled the tassels of her cordelière; Charles caressed his dog.

"But what was your intention, sir?" continued Charles. "Were you acting violently?"

"Against whom, sire?"

"Why, against Henry, or François, or myself?"

"Sire, we had the renunciation of your brother-in-law, the consent of your brother, and, as I had the honor to tell you, we were on the point of soliciting your majesty's authority, when there happened this unfortunate affair of M. de Maurevel's."

"Well, mother, I see no objection to all this. You were perfectly right, M. de Mouy, in requiring a king. Yes, Navarre may be, and ought to be, a separate kingdom. Moreover, this kingdom seems made expressly to endow my brother D'Alençon, who has always had so great a desire for a crown, that when we wear our own, he cannot withdraw his gaze therefrom. The only thing which opposed this coronation was Harry's rights; but since Harry voluntarily abdicates——"

"Voluntarily, sire?"

"It appears to be the will of God! M. de Mouy, you are free to return to your brethren, whom I have chastised—somewhat rudely, perchance; but that is between God and myself; and tell them, that since they desire to have my brother, the Duke d'Alençon, for King of Navarre, the King of France accedes to their desires. From this moment, Navarre is a kingdom, and its sovereign's name is François. I ask but eight days for my brother to be ready to leave Paris with the *éclat* and pomp which appertain to a king. Go, M. de Mouy—go. M. de Nancey, allow M. de Mouy to retire. He is free."

"Sire," said De Mouy, advancing a step, "will your majesty allow me——"

"Yes," replied Charles.

And he extended his hand to the young Huguenot.

De Mouy went on one knee, and respectfully kissed the king's hand.

"Apropos," said Charles, as De Mouy was about to rise, "have you not demanded from me justice on that ruffian, De Maurevel?"

"I have, sire."

"I know not where he is, that I might render it to you, for he is in hiding; but if you meet him, take justice into your own hands. I authorize you to do so, and with all my heart."

"Oh, sire! exclaimed De Mouy, "this is all I could desire. I know not where he is; but your majesty may rest assured I will find him."

De Mouy respectfully saluted the king and Catherine, and then retired uninterrupted. He made all haste to the hostelry of the *Belle Etoile*, where he found his horse, by whose aid, three hours after he had quitted Paris, the young man breathed in safety behind the walls of Mantes.

Catherine, bursting with rage, regained her apartment, whence she passed into that of Marguerite, where she found Henry in his dressing gown, as if just going to bed.

"Satan!" she muttered, "aid a poor queen, for whom God will do nothing more!"

CHAPTER XLVIII.

TWO HEADS FOR ONE CROWN.

"REQUEST M. d'Alençon to come to me," said Charles, as his mother left him.

M. de Nancey hastened to M. d'Alençon's apartments, and delivered the king's message. The duke started when he heard it. He always trembled in Charles's presence, and the more so when he had reason to be afraid. Still, he went to his brother with all speed.

Charles was standing up, and whistling a hunting air.

As he entered, the Duke d'Alençon caught from the glassy eye of Charles one of those looks full of hatred, which he so well understood.

"Your majesty has asked for me," he said. "I am here, sire. What is your majesty's desire?"

"I desire to tell you, brother, that, in order to recompense you for the great friendship you bear me, I have resolved to do for you to-day the thing you most desire in all the world."

"For me?"

"Yes, for you. Ask yourself what that thing is of which you most frequently dream, without daring to ask for, and that thing I will give you."

"Sire," said François, "I swear to you, that there is nothing I more desire than the continuance of the king's good health."

"Then you will be deeply gratified to know, D'Alençon, that the indisposition I experienced at the time when the Poles arrived has quite passed by. I have escaped, thanks to Harry, a furious wild boar, who would have ripped me up, and I am so well as not to envy the healthiest man in my dominions: so that, without being an unkind brother, you may wish for something else besides the continuation of my health, which is perfectly restored."

"I desire nothing else, sire."

"Yes, yes, François," continued Charles, impatiently, "you desire the crown of Navarre, and have had an understanding to that effect with Harry and De Mouy: the first, that he would abdicate, and the second, that he might offer it to you. Well, Harry has renounced, De Mouy has mentioned your wishes to me, and the crown you are ambitious to——"

"Stop!" said D'Alençon, in a trembling voice.

"Well, *mort diable!* it is yours."

D'Alençon turned ghastly pale, and then his face was suffused. The favor which the king granted him at this moment threw him into utter despair.

"But, sire," he replied, palpitating with emotion, and in vain trying to recover his self-possession, "I have never desired, and certainly never sought for such a thing."

"That is possible," said the king, "for you are very discreet, brother; but it has been desired—sought for you."

"Sire, I swear to you that I never——"

"Do not swear."

"But, sire, do you, then, exile me?"

"Do you call this exile, François? *Peste!* you are hard to please. What better thing could you hope for?"

D'Alençon bit his lips in despair.

"*Ma foi!*" continued Charles, affecting a kind demeanor, "I did not think you were so popular, François, and particularly with the Huguenots. Why, they really petition for you; and what better could I desire them to have than a person devoted to me; a brother whom I love, and who is incapable of betraying me, at the head of a party who for thirty years has been in arms against us. This must calm everything, as if by enchantment, to say nothing of the fact that we shall be all kings in the family. There will only be poor Harry, who will remain my friend, and nothing more. But he is not ambitious, and this title, which no one else covets, he claims."

"Oh, sire, you mistake; I covet that title—a title to which no one has such right as I have. Henry is only your brother by marriage; I am your brother by blood and in heart, and I entreat you, sire, keep me near you."

"No, no, François," replied Charles, "it would be wrong."

"How, sire?"

"For a thousand reasons."

"But, sire, have you a more faithful companion than I am? From my childhood I have never quitted your majesty."

"I know it well—I know it well; and sometimes I have wished you further off."

"What means your majesty?"

"Oh, nothing—nothing; I know—I know. Ah! what glorious hunting you will have there, François; I shall envy you! Do you know they chase the bear in the mountains there, as we do the boar here. You'll send us such splendid skins; you know they hunt there with the poniard—wait for the animal, excite and irritate him: he goes towards the hunter, and four paces off he rises on his hind legs; then they plunge the steel into his heart, as Henry did the wild boar at our last hunt. You know it is dangerous work; but you are brave, François; and the danger would be real pleasure to you."

"Ah! your majesty increases my trouble, for I shall no more hunt with you."

"Corbœuf! so much the better," said the king, "it does not suit either of us to hunt together——"

"What means your majesty?"

"To hunt with me causes you such pleasure, and creates in you so much emotion, that you, who are skill personified—you, who with any arquebuss can bring down a magpie at a hundred paces—with a weapon of which you are such a perfect master, failed at twenty paces to hit a wild boar, and broke the leg of my best horse! *Mort diable!* François, that makes one reflect, you must know!"

"Oh, sire, think of my emotion," said D'Alençon, livid with agitation.

"Yes," replied Charles; "I guess what the emotion might be, and so I say, François, it is best for us to hunt at a distance from each other, for fear of such emotions. You might, you know, in another emotion, kill the horseman instead of the horse—the king instead of the animal! When Montgomery killed our father Henry II., by accident—emotion, perhaps—the blow placed our brother François II. on the throne, and sent our father Henry to Saint Denys; a little in this way can do so much."

The duke felt the perspiration pour down his brow at this unexpected attack. The king had surmised all, and veiling his anger under a jesting tone, was perhaps more terrible than if he had outpoured his lava of hate in its fullest wrath; his revenge was proportioned to his rancor. In proportion as the one was sharpened, the other increased; and, for the first time, D'Alençon felt remorse, or rather regret, for having meditated a crime that had not succeeded. He had sustained the struggle as long as he could, but at this last blow he bowed his head.

Charles fixed on him his vulture gaze, and watched closely every feeling that displayed itself in the young duke's countenance, as if he perused an open book. "Brother," said the king, "we have declared our resolution; that resolution is immutable. You will go."

D'Alençon started; but Charles did not appear to observe it, and continued: "I wish that Navarre should be proud of having at its head a brother of the King of France. Gold, power, honor—you will have all that belongs to your birth, as your brother Henry had; and, like him," he added, with a smile, "you will bless me when afar off—thank Heaven, blessings know no distance!"

"Sire——"

"Accept, or rather resign yourself. Once a king, we shall find for you a wife worthy of a son of France, who may—who knows?—bring you another throne."

"But," observed the Duke d'Alençon, "your majesty forgets your good friend Henry."

"Henry!—why, I told you he does not desire the throne of Navarre; he has abandoned it. Henry is a jovial fellow, and not a pale-face, like you; he likes to amuse himself, and laugh at his ease, and not weary himself, as we are compelled to do, who wear crowns upon our heads."

"Your majesty then desires me to occupy myself——"

"By no means. Do not in any way disturb yourself, I will arrange everything myself. Say not a word to any one, and I will take upon myself to give publicity to everything. François, good day."

There was no reply. The duke bowed and left the apartment, with rage devouring his heart.

He was most desirous to find Henry, and talk with him of all that had passed; but he could only find Catherine, for Henry avoided, whilst his brother sought him.

The duke, seeing Catherine, endeavored to swallow his griefs and tried to smile.

"Well, madame," he said, "do you know the great news?"

"I know that there is an idea of making a king of you, sir."

"It is a great kindness on the part of my brother, madame; and I am inclined to think that a portion of my gratitude is due to you; although, I confess, that at bottom it gives me pain thus to despoil the King of Navarre."

"You are very fond of Harry, then, my son, it appears."

"Why, yes, for some time we have been closely allied."

"Do you suppose that he loves you as much as you love him?"

"I hope so, madame."

"Are there brothers, then, amongst kings?" she asked, with a singular smile.

"Oh, we were neither of us kings when our alliance began."

"Yes; but things are changed now: who can say that you will not both be kings?"

Catherine saw, by the start and sudden color of the duke, that the shaft had hit the mark.

"He? Harry, king? and of what kingdom?"

"The most glorious in Christendom, my son."

"Ah!" said D'Alençon, growing very pale, "what mean you?"

"What a good mother should say to a son—what you have thought of more than once, François."

"I?" said the duke, "I have thought of nothing, madame, I swear to you!"

"I believe you; for your friend, your brother Henry, as you call him, is, under his apparent frankness, a very clever and wily person, who keeps his secrets better than you do yours, François. For instance, did he ever tell you that De Mouy was his man of business?"

And Catherine looked at François as though she would read his very heart; but dissimulation was François' forte, and he bore her gaze unshrinkingly.

"De Mouy!" said he, with surprise, and as if he uttered the name for the first time.

"Yes, the Huguenot De Mouy de Saint-Phale; he who nearly killed De Maurevel, and who is intriguing and raising an army to support your brother Henry against your family."

Catherine, unaware that François knew as much on this matter as herself, rose at these words, and would have gone out majestically, but François detained her.

"Mother," he said, "another word, if you please. How can Henry, with his feeble resources, carry on any war to disquiet my family?"

"Child," said the queen, smiling, "know he is supported by more than thirty thousand men, who, the day he says the word, will appear as suddenly as if they sprang forth from the ground; and these thirty thousand men are Huguenots, remember; in other words the bravest soldiers in the world; and then, he has a protector you have not been able, or have not chosen, to conciliate."

"Who is that?"

"He has the king—the king, who loves him, pushes him on; the king, who, from jealousy against your brother of Poland, and from spite against you, seeks a successor out of his family."

"The king! Do you think so, mother?"

"Do you not see how he takes to Harry, his dear Harry?"

"Yes, madame; yes."

"And how he is repaid in return! for this very Harry, forgetting how his brother-in-law would have shot him on Saint Bartholomew's day, grovels to the very earth like a a dog, and licks the hand which has beaten him."

"Yes," said François, "Henry is very humble with my brother Charles; and, the king always rallying him as to his ignorance, he has began to study hawking. It was only yesterday he asked me if I had not some books on that sport."

"Well," said Catherine, "well, and what reply did you make him?"

"That I would look in my library."

"Good, good!" answered Catherine; "he must have that book. I will give him one in your name. Will you, D'Alençon, obey me blindly in all I desire you to do with regard to Henry, who loves you not, whatever you may think."

D'Alençon smiled, and replied, "I will, mother."

"Well, then, on the morning of the next hunt come here and seek for the book; I will give it you, and you shall carry it to the detested Henry."

"And——?"

"Leave the rest to Providence or chance."

François bowed in acquiescence, and left his mother's chamber.

Meantime, Marguerite received through La Mole a letter from De Mouy addressed to the King of Navarre. As in politics the two illustrious allies had no secrets, she opened the missive, and read it; and then, going quickly and silently along the secret passage, went into the King of Navarre's antechamber, no longer guarded, since Orthon's disappearance. This circumstance had greatly disquieted Henry, who felt assured the poor boy had fallen a victim to some machination of the queen-mother.

Any other than Henry would have kept silence; but Henry calculated cleverly, and saw his silence would betray him; and thus he sought and inquired for Orthon everywhere, even in the presence of the king and the queen-mother, and of every one, down to the sentinel at the wicket of the Louvre; but every inquiry was in vain.

The antechamber was thus empty; Henry declaring he would not replace him until he knew for certain that he had disappeared forever. Henry turned round as the queen entered.

"You, madame!" he cried.

"Yes," replied Marguerite; "read quickly!" and she handed the open letter to him. It contained these lines:

"SIRE,—The moment has arrived for putting our plan of flight in execution.

"In five or six days there will be hawking on the banks of the Seine, from Saint-Germains to Maisons all along the forest.

"Go to this meeting, although it is only a hawking party; put a good coat of mail under your doublet, your best sword by your side, and ride the fleetest horse in your stable.

"About noon, when the sport is at its height, and the king is galloping after his falcon, get away alone, if you come alone; with the queen, if her majesty will follow you.

"Fifty of our party will be concealed in the pavilion of François the First, of which we have the key; no one will know that they are there, for they will come at night, and the shutters will be closed.

"You will pass by the Allée des Violettes, at the end of which I shall be on the watch; at the right of this allée will be Messieurs de la Mole and Coconnas, with two horses, intended to replace yours if they should be fatigued.

"Adieu, sire! be ready, as we shall be."

"Now then, sire," said Marguerite, "be a hero; it is not difficult. You have but to follow the route indicated, and create for me a glorious throne," said the daughter of Henry II.

An imperceptible smile rose to the thin lips of the

Béarnais, as he kissed Marguerite's lips, and went out to explore the passage, whistling the burden of an old song:

"Cil qui mieux battit la muraille
N'entra point dedans le chasteau."

The precaution was good, for as he opened his bedchamber door the Duke d'Alençon opened that of his antechamber, Henry motioned to Marguerite with his hand, and then said aloud, "Ah, is it you, brother? Welcome!"

The queen understood her husband's meaning, and went quickly into a dressing-closet, in front of the door of which was a thick tapestry.

D'Alençon entered with a timorous step, and looking around him, "Are we alone, brother?" he asked, in an undertone.

"Quite. But what ails you?—you seem greatly disturbed."

"We are discovered, Henry?"

"How discovered?"

"De Mouy has been arrested!"

"I know it."

"Well, De Mouy has told the king all!"

"All what?"

"He said I was ambitious of the throne of Navarre, and had conspired to obtain it."

"The dunderhead!" said Henry. "So that you are compromised, my dear brother! How is it, then, that you are not under arrest?"

"I cannot tell; the king jested with me, and offered me the throne of Navarre, but I said nothing."

"And you did well, *ventre-saint-gris!*" said the Béarnais. "Stand firm, for our lives depend on that."

"Yes," said François, "our position is difficult, and that is why I came to ask your advice, my brother. Ought I to flee or remain?"

"You have seen the king, and he has spoken to you?"

"Yes."

"Well, you must have ascertained his thoughts; act from your own inspiration."

"I would rather remain," said François.

Master of himself as he was, yet Henry allowed a movement of joy to escape him, and François observed it.

"Remain, then," said Henry.

"And you?"

"Why, if you remain, I have no motive for going; I should go if you went, but stay if you stay."

"So, then," said D'Alençon, "there is an end of all our plans, and you give way at the first repulse."

"Thanks to my contented disposition," replied Henry, "I am happy anywhere and everywhere."

"Well, then," observed D'Alençon, "there's no more to be said; only, if you change your mind, let me know."

"*Corbleu!* I shall be sure to do that," replied Henry. "Have we not agreed to have no secrets for one another?"

D'Alençon said no more, and withdrew full of thought, for he believed he had seen the tapestry move at a certain moment; and, indeed, scarcely was D'Alençon gone than Marguerite reappeared.

"What do you think of this visit?" inquired Henry.

"That there is something new and important; what it is I will learn."

"In the meanwhile——?"

"In the meanwhile, fail not to come to my apartments to-morrow evening."

"I will not fail, be assured, madame," was the reply of Henry, kissing his wife's hand very gallantly.

With the same precaution she had used in coming, Marguerite returned to her own apartments.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE BOOK OF VENERIE.

FIVE days had elapsed since the events we have related. The Louvre clock had just struck four, when D'Alençon, who, with all the rest of the court, had risen early to prepare for the hunt, entered his mother's apartment.

The queen was not in her chamber, but she had left orders that if her son came he was to wait. At the end of a few minutes she came out of a cabinet where she carried on her chemical studies, and into which no one ever entered. As she opened the door, a strong odor of some acrid perfume pervaded the room, and looking through the door of the cabinet, he perceived a thick white vapor, like that of some aromatic substance, floating in the air.

"Yes," said Catherine, "I burnt some old parchments, and their smell was so offensive that I cast some juniper into the brazier." D'Alençon bowed.

"Well," continued the queen, concealing beneath the sleeves of her robe-de-chambre her hand stained with large reddish spots, "anything new?"

"Nothing."

"Have you seen Henry?"

"Yes."

"Will he go?"

"He refuses positively."

"The knave!"

"What say you, madame?"

"That he will go."

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"Then he escapes us?"

"Yes," said Catherine.

"And you let him depart?"

"I not only suffer him, but, I tell you, it is necessary he should leave the court."

"I do not understand you."

"Listen: a skilful physician, the same who gave me the book of venerie you are about to present to the King of Navarre, has told me that he is on the point of being attacked with consumption—an incurable disease; so that if he be doomed to die, it were better that he should die away from us than at the court."

"That would be too painful for us."

"Especially for Charles; whereas, if he die, after having betrayed him, he will look upon his death as a punishment from heaven."

"You are right: it were better he should depart, But are you sure he will go?"

"All my measures are taken. The place of rendezvous is in the forest of St. Germain's; fifty Huguenots are to escort him to Fontainebleau, where five hundred others await him."

"And does Margot accompany him?" asked D'Alençon.

"Yes, but upon Henry's death she returns to court."

"Are you sure that Henry will die?"

"The physician who gave me this book assured me of it."

"And where is this book?"

Catherine entered her cabinet, and returned instantly with the book in her hand.

"Here it is," said she.

D'Alençon looked at it, not without a certain feeling of terror.

"What is this book?" asked he, shuddering.

"I have already told you. It is a treatise on the art of rearing and training falcons, goshawks, and ger-falcons, written for the Italian prince, Castruccio Castracani, of Lucca."

"What am I to do with it?"

"Give it to Henry, who has asked you for a book of the kind. As he is going to hawk this morning with the king, he will not fail to read it; but be sure to give it to him."

"Oh, I dare not!" said D'Alençon, shuddering.

"Why not?" replied the queen; "it is a book like any other, except it has lain by so long that the leaves stick together. Do not attempt to read it, for it can only be read by wetting the finger, and turning over each leaf, which occasions a great loss of time."

"So that it will only be read by a man who is anxious to learn the art of hawking?"

"Exactly so, my son—you understand?"

"Oh," said D'Aleçnon, "I hear Henry in the court; give it to me, and I will avail myself of his absence to place it in his room."

"I had rather you gave it to *him;* it is more certain."

"I have already told you I dare not."

"At least place it where it can be easily seen."

"I will place it where he must see it. Will it be better to open it?"

"Yes, open it."

"Give it me, then."

D'Alençon took with a trembling hand the book Catherine held out to him.

"Take it," said she. "There is no danger; besides, you have your gloves on."

D'Alençon wrapped the book in his mantle, as if still fearful.

"Make haste," continued the queen; "I expect Henry will enter every moment."

"Madame, I go."

And the duke left the apartment, trembling with emotion.

We have often introduced our readers into the apartments of the King of Navarre, and have made them witnesses of the events that have passed there, but never did the walls of the room see a face so pale as the Duke D'Alençon's, when he entered the apartment, the book in his hand.

On the wall hung Henry's sword. Some links of mail were scattered on the floor, a well-filled purse and a poniard lay on the table, and the light ashes in the grate showed D'Alençon that Henry had put on a shirt of mail, collected what money he could, and burnt all papers that might compromise him.

"My mother was right," thought D'Alençon. "He would betray me."

Doubtless, this conviction gave him strength; for after having sounded the walls and lifted the tapestry, he took the book from under his cloak, placed it on the table, then, with a hesitation that betrayed his fears, opened the book at an engraving. The instant he had done so, he drew off his glove and cast it into the fire; the leather crackled, burned, and was soon reduced to ashes.

D'Alençon waited until he had seen it consumed, and then hastily returned to his own apartment.

As he entered, he heard steps on the winding stair, and not doubting but that it was Henry, he closed his door.

Then he looked out of his window into the court below. Henry was not there, and this strengthened François' belief that it was he whom he had just heard.

The duke sat down, and took up a book : it was the History of France, a work dedicated to Charles IX.

But the duke could not fix his attention on it ; it seemed to him he could see through the walls. His eyes appeared to plunge into the chamber of Henry, spite of the obstacles that separated them. In order to drive away the terrible object before his mind's eye, the duke vainly looked at his arms, his ornaments, his books ; every detail of the engraving that he had seen but for a moment was before him still : it was a gentleman on horseback, recalling his falcon, in a flat landscape.

Then it was not the book he saw, but the King of Navarre reading it, and wetting his thumb in order to turn over the pages. At this sight, fictitious and imaginary as it was, D'Alençon staggered against a table, and covered his eyes with his hands, as if to hide the horrible vision.

Suddenly D'Alençon saw Henry in the court ; he stopped a few moments to speak to the men who were loading two mules, ostensibly with his provisions for the chase, but really with the money and other things he wished to take with him ; then, having given his orders, he advanced towards the door.

D'Alençon stood motionless ; it was not Henry, then, he had heard mount the stairs. He opened his door and listened ; this time there was no mistake—it was Henry ; D'Alençon recognized his step, even to the peculiar jingle of his spurs.

Henry's door opened, and then closed.

"*Bon!*" said D'Alençon ; "he has passed through the first apartment, he has entered his bedchamber, he has looked if his sword, his purse, and his poniard are there ; then he has seen the book open on the table. 'What is this book?' he asks himself; 'where has it come from?—who has brought it?' Then, seeing the engraving, he tries to read it, and turns over the leaves."

A cold damp passed over François.

"Will he call for help?" said he. "Is the poison sudden? No! for my mother said he would die of consumption."

Ten minutes passed in these horrible reflections. D'Alençon could support it no longer; he rose, and passed through his chamber, which was already filled with gentlemen.

"Good day, gentlemen," said he, "I am going to the king."

And to distract his attention, to prepare an *alibi*, perhaps, D'Alençon descended to his brother's apartments. Why, he knew not—what had he to say? Nothing! it was not Charles he sought—it was Henry he fled from.

François traversed successively the saloon and the sleeping-room, without meeting any one; he then thought Charles was in his armory, and he opened the door.

Charles was seated at a table in an armchair of carved oak; his back was turned to the door by which François had entered. The duke approached silently.

Charles was reading.

"*Pardieu!*" cried the king, "what an admirable book!—I did not think there was such a work in France."

D'Alençon listened.

"Devil take the leaves!" said Charles, as, wetting his thumb, he turned them. "It seems as if they had purposely stuck the leaves together, to conceal the marvels they contain."

D'Alençon bounded forward. The book Charles was reading was the same that D'Alençon had taken into Henry's room. A cry burst from his lips.

"Ah, it is you, D'Alençon!" said the king; "you are just in time to see the most admirable work on venerie in the world."

D'Alençon's first idea was to snatch the book from his brother, but an infernal thought restrained him.

"Sire," asked he, "how did this book come into your possession?"

"Oh, I went into Harry's room to see if he was ready, and found this treasure, which I brought down with me to read."

And the king again moistened his finger, and again turned over the page.

"Sire," faltered D'Alençon, whose hair stood on end, "sire, I come to tell you——"

"Let me finish this chapter, François, and then tell me what you please. I have read, or rather devoured, fifty pages."

"My brother has tasted the poison five-and-twenty times," thought D'Alençon; "he is a dead man!"

Franèois wiped the cold dew from his brow, and waited in silence, as the king bade him, until he had finished the chapter.

CHAPTER L.

THE HAWKING PARTY.

Charles read on: he seemed, indeed, to devour the pages; and each page, as we have said, was gummed to the other.

D'Alençon gazed wildly on this terrible spectacle.

"Oh," murmured he, "what will happen now? Shall I go into exile and seek a visionary throne, whilst Henry, on the first intelligence of Charles's illness, will return to some fortress near Paris, whence he may come hither in an hour or two; so that before D'Anjou even hears of Charles's death the whole dynasty will be changed."

Instantly his plan with regard to Henry altered. It was Charles who had read the poisoned book: Henry must stay. He was less to be dreaded in the Bastille, or a prisoner at Vincennes, than free, and at the head of thirty thousand men.

The duke waited until Charles finished his chapter, and then, "Brother," said he, "I waited because you ordered me; but I have something of the greatest importance to say to you."

"Ah, the devil take you!" returned Charles, whose pale cheeks glowed with unusual fire. "If you come and worry me, I'll get rid of you, as I have of the King of Poland."

"It is not on that subject I would speak to you. Your majesty has touched me in my most sensitive point, that of my love for you as a brother, and my devotion as your subject; and I come to prove to you I am no traitor."

"Well, well," said Charles, crossing his legs, and throwing himself back on his chair; "some fresh report—some new nightmare."

"No, sire; a certainty—a plot, of which I know all the details."

"A plot! let us hear this wonderful plot."

"Sire," said François, "whilst your majesty hawks in the plain of Vesinet, the King of Navarre will fly into the forest of St. Germain's, where a troop of his friends await him, and will escape with him."

"I expected this!" cried Charles; "a fresh calumny against my poor Harry! When will you leave him alone?"

"Your majesty need not wait long to know whether what I say be true or false."

"Why not?"

"Because this evening he will be gone."

Charles rose. "Listen," said he: "I will once more seem to believe you; but mind, it is for the last time. Without there! summon the King of Navarre."

A soldier was about to obey, when François stopped him.

"That is a bad way to learn the truth," said he. "Henry will deny it, give a signal, all his accomplices will conceal themselves, and my mother and myself will be accused of calumny."

Charles opened the window, for the blood was rushing into his head. Then, turning to D'Alençon, "What would you do then?" asked he.

"Sire," said D'Alençon, "I would surround the wood with three detachments of light horse, who, at a certain hour, should beat the forest, and drive every one in it to the Pavilion of François the First, which I would, as if casually, have appointed as the place for dining at. Then, when Henry left you, I would follow him to the rendezvous, and capture him and his accomplices."

"A good idea enough!" returned Charles. "Call the captain of my guards."

D'Alençon drew from his doublet a silver whistle, fastened to a chain of gold, and whistled. De Nancey appeared. Charles gave him some orders, in an undertone. Meanwhile Actæon, the boar-hound, had dragged a book off the table and began to tear it. Charles turned round and swore a terrible oath. The book was the precious Treatise on Venerie, of which there existed but three copies in the world.

The chastisement was proportionate to the offense. Charles seized the whip and lashed the dog soundly: Actæon yelled, and disappeared under a table covered with a large green cloth. The king picked up the book, and saw with joy that but one leaf was wanting, and that leaf, not a page of text, but an engraving. He locked it up carefully in a cupboard, to D'Alençon's great regret; who, now that it had fulfilled its fearful task, would fain have seen it out of Charles's hands.

Six o'clock struck, and the king descended. He first closed the door of the armory, locked it, and put his key in his pocket, D'Alençon earnestly watching each movement; on his way down-stairs he stopped, and passed his hand over his eye.

"I do not know what is the matter with me," observed he, "but I feel very weak."

"Perhaps," faltered D'Alençon, "there is a storm in the air."

"A storm in March! you are mad," said Charles. "No, no; I feel a dizziness, my skin is dry, I am over-fatigued; that's all."

The fresh air, the cries of the huntsmen, and the noise of the horses and hounds, produced their ordinary effect upon him ; he breathed freely, and felt exhilarant.

His first care was to look for Henry and Marguerite, who seemed, excellent spouses, as if they could not quit one another.

On perceiving Charles, Henry spurred his horse, and in three bounds was beside him.

"Ah, ah, Harry !" said Charles, "you are mounted as if you were going to hunt the stag, and yet you know we are only going to hawk."

Then without awaiting a reply, " Forward, gentlemen !" cried he, frowning ; "we must be at the meet by nine."

Catherine was watching at a window, and her pale face only appeared : her figure was concealed by the curtain.

At Charles's order, the whole cortége passed through the gate of the Louvre, and along the road to St.-Germains, amidst the acclamations of the people, who saluted their young king as he rode by on his white steed.

" What did he say to you ?" asked Marguerite of Henry.

"He felicitated me on the stoutness of my horse."

"Is that all ?"

"Yes."

"I fear he knows something."

"I fear so."

"Let us be cautious."

Henry's face was lighted up, in reply, with one of his cordial smiles, as if to say, " Be easy, *ma mie.*"

As for Catherine, when she had seen them all depart, she let fall the curtain : "This time," murmured she, "I think I have him."

Then, to satisfy herself after having waited for a few minutes, she entered the King of Navarre's apartments, by aid of her pass-key. But she searched in vain for the book.

"He has locked it up," thought she ; "and if he has not read it already, he will."

And she descended, convinced her project had succeeded.

The king arrived at St.-Germains. The sun, hitherto hidden by a cloud, lighted up the splendid cortége. Then, as if it had awaited this moment, a heron rose from the reeds with a mournful cry.

"Haw! haw!" cried Charles, unhooding his falcon.

The falcon, dazzled for a moment by the light, described a circle; then suddenly perceiving the heron, dashed after it.

However, the heron, which had risen a hundred yards before the beaters, had profited by the time occupied in unhooding the falcon to gain a considerable distance; he was therefore at least at a height of five hundred feet, and was still mounting rapidly.

"Haw! haw! Bec-de-Fer!" cried Charles; "haw! haw!"

The noble bird, like an arrow, mounted after the heron, which had now well-nigh disappeared.

"Ah, coward!" said Charles, putting his horse to its speed, and throwing back his head, so as not to lose sight of the chase; "courage, Bec-de-Fer!"

The contest was most curious; the falcon was rapidly nearing the heron; the only question was, which could rise the highest. Fear had better wings than courage. The falcon passed underneath, and the heron, profiting by his advantage, dealt him a blow with his long beak. The falcon staggered, and seemed as if about to fly, but soon recovering himself, went after the heron. The latter, pursuing his advantage, had changed the direction of his flight, and sought the forest; but the falcon followed him so closely, that the heron was fain again to mount, and in a few seconds the two birds were scarcely distinguishable.

"Bravo, Bec-de-Fer!" cried Charles, "see, he is uppermost!"

"Faith!" said Henry, "I confess I do not see the one or the other."

"Nor I," said Marguerite.

"If you can't see them, you may hear them. At least the heron," replied Charles. "Hark! he asks quarter."

As he spoke, two or three plaintive cries were heard.

"Look, look!" cried Charles, "and you will see them descend quicker than they went up."

As the king spoke, the two birds reappeared: the falcon was uppermost.

"Bec-de-Fer has him!" shouted Charles.

The heron, outflown by the falcon, no longer sought to defend himself; he folded his wings, and dropped like a stone; but his adversary did the same; and when the fugitive again resumed his flight, he received a stroke that stunned him; he fell to the earth, and the falcon, uttering a note of victory, alighted by him.

"Brave falcon!" cried Charles, galloping towards the spot where the heron lay. But suddenly he stopped, and, uttering a piercing cry, let fall his bridle, and pressed his hand to his stomach. All the courtiers hastened up.

"It is nothing," said he, with inflamed features and haggard eyes. "But I felt as if a hot iron was passing through me just now; but it is nothing." And he galloped on.

D'Alençon turned pale.

"What is the matter now?" asked Henry of Marguerite.

"I know not," replied she; "but did you see Charles?—he was purple!"

"He is not so generally," said Henry.

Arrived at the scene of combat, Charles sprang off his horse; but on alighting, he was forced to seize the saddle to prevent himself from falling.

"My brother!" cried Marguerite, "what is the matter?"

"I feel," said Charles, "what Portia must have felt when she swallowed her burning coals. It seems as if my breath was flame."

Meantime, the falcon was reclaimed, and all the suite gathered round Charles.

"What is all this?" cried he, "*Corps de Christ!* it is nothing, or at most only the sun that affects me. Unhood all the falcons!—there go a whole flight of herons!"

Five or six falcons were instantly unhooded, whilst all the chase galloped along the bank of the river.

"Well, madame, what say you?" asked Henry.

"That the moment is favorable, and that if the king does not look back, we may easily gain the forest."

Henry called the attendant who had the fallen heron in charge, and whilst the court swept on, remained behind, as if to examine the bird. At this moment, and as if to aid his plans, a pheasant rose. Henry slipped the jesses of his falcon: he had now the pretext of a chase on his own account to assist him.

CHAPTER LI.

THE PAVILION OF FRANCOIS THE FIRST.

AT the right of the Allée des Violettes is a long clearing, so far that it cannot be discovered from the high-road, but yet the high-road can be seen from the clearing.

In the middle of this clearing two men were lying on the grass, having a traveling cloak spread beneath them, at their side a long sword, and a musketoon (then called a petronel) with the muzzle turned from them. One of them was leaning on his knee and one hand, listening like a hare or deer.

"It appears to me," said this individual, "that the hunt drew very close upon us just now. I heard the cries of the hunters as they cheered on the falcon."

"And now," said the other, who appeared to await events with much more philosophy than his comrade, "now I hear them no longer; they must be a long way off."

"What the devil! my dear Annibal," said the other, "would you have? We must wait quietly; the place hides us and our mules and horses very well; De Mouy has selected a good spot, one which has all the concealments and privacy indispensable to a conspirator."

"Ah, good!" said the other gentleman; "that's the word, is it? Well, I expected it. So, then, we are conspiring, are we?"

"We are not conspiring; we are serving the king and queen."

"Well, it's all very odd!" said Coconnas, yawning. "It is not yet twelve o'clock, and therefore we have time for a nap;" and so saying, Coconnas stretched himself on his mantle like a man who is about to add practise to precept, but as his ear touched the ground, he raised his finger and motioned La Mole to be silent.

Then a distant sound was heard, at first scarcely perceptible, and to unpractised ears would only have been the wind, but to the cavaliers it was the distant galloping of horses.

La Mole sprang to his feet in a moment.

"Here they are!" said he. "Now then for a start!"

Coconnas rose more quietly, and then a regular and measured noise struck the ear of the two friends; the neighing of a horse made the horses they had at ten paces off prick up their ears, and in an alley there passed, like a white shadow, a female, who, turning towards them, made a particular signal and disappeared.

"The queen!" they exclaimed, both at once.

"What can this mean?" said Coconnas.

"And she did so with her arm," said La Mole, "which means: 'Presently'——"

"She did so," said Coconnas, "which means: 'Go at once'——"

"The signal means: '*Wait for me.*'"

"It means: '*Away at once!*'"

"Well," said La Mole, "let each act on his own conviction. Do you go—I will remain."

Coconnas shrugged his shoulders and laid down on the grass. At the same moment, in the opposite direction from that which the queen had followed, but in the same alley, there passed, at top speed, a troop of horsemen, whom the two friends recognized as Protestants. They disappeared rapidly.

"*Peste!* the thing becomes serious," said Coconnas, rising. "Let us go to the Pavilion of François the First."

"No," replied La Mole; "by no means. If we are discovered, the attention of the king will be especially directed towards the pavilion, as that is the general rendezvous."

"Well, perhaps you are right," grumbled Coconnas.

Hardly had these words been uttered, than a horseman passed like a flash of lightning amidst the trees, and leaping over ditches, bushes, briars, and all obstacles, reached the young men. He had a pistol in each hand, and guided his horse in his furious career with his knees only.

"M. de Mouy!" exclaimed Caconnas, uneasy, and now more on the alert than La Mole; "M. de Mouy flying! it is every one for himself!"

"Quick—quick!" cried the Huguenot; "away with you!—all is lost!—I have come round to tell you so, and now to horse and away!"

"And the queen!" criedLa Mole.

But the voice of the young man was lost in the distance, and he neither heard nor replied.

Coconnas had soon made up his mind, whilst La Mole remained motionless, following De Mouy with his eyes, as he disappeared amongst the branches. He hastened to the horses, and leaping on his own, threw the bridle of the other to La Mole, and prepared to dash off. "Come, come!" he exclaimed, "Let us be off, as De Mouy advises, and De Mouy is a sensible man. Away, away, La Mole!"

"One moment," said La Mole; "we came here for something."

"Unless it is to get hanged," replied Coconnas, "I would advise you to lose no more time. I would only observe, that when M. de Mouy de Saint-Phale flies, all the world may flee too."

"M. de Mouy de Saint-Phale," said La Mole, "is not charged to carry off the Queen Marguerite! M. de Mouy de Saint-Phale does not love the Queen Marguerite!"

"*Mordi!* and he is quite right too! '*Corne de bœuf!*' as King Charles says, we are conspiring, my dear fellow; and when men conspire, they should make off at the right time. Mount, mount, La Mole!"

"Well, well, let us then to horse and away!"

"That's right."

La Mole turned round to lay his hand on the pommel of his saddle; but at the moment when he put foot in the stirrup, a voice of command was heard, saying:

"Halt there—surrender!"

And at the same moment the figure of a man was seen behind an oak—then another—then thirty; they were the light dragoons dismounted, who were making their way quietly, and searching the forest.

"What did I tell you?" muttered Coconnas.

The light dragoons were within thirty paces of the two friends.

"Well, gentlemen," said the Piedmontese, "what is your pleasure?"

The lieutenant desired his men to take aim at the two friends.

"Gentlemen," said Coconnas, drawing his sword, and raising it in the air, "we surrender; but allow me to inquire wherefore we are called on to do so?"

"That you must ask of the King of Navarre."

"What crime have we committed?"

"M. d'Alençon will inform you."

Coconnas and La Mole looked at each other. The name of their enemy at such a moment had very little to give them confidence. Yet they neither of them made any resistance. Coconnas was desired to alight from his horse, a maneuver which he executed without a word; then they were both placed in the center of the light dragoons, and took the route to the Pavilion of François I.

"You wished to see the Pavilion of François," said Coconnas to La Mole, when they saw through the trees the walls of a pretty gothic building; "well, there it is."

La Mole made no reply, but only extended his hand to Coconnas. By the side of this beautiful pavilion, built in the time of Louis XII., and which was called after François, because he always made it a *rendezvous de chasse,* was a hut built for the huntsmen and prickers, and which was now nearly concealed by the muskets, halberds, and swords in front of it. The prisoners were conducted to this hut.

We will now throw a little light on the gloomy position of the two friends, by stating a few details. The Protestant gentlemen had assembled, as was agreed, in the Pavilion of François I., of which we know De Mouy had the key. Masters of the forest, as they believed, they had placed sentinels here and there, whom the light dragoons, having exchanged their white scarfs into red ones (a precaution due to the ingenious zeal of M. de Nancey), had laid hands upon without striking a blow.

The light dragoons continued their quest, keeping a good watch over the pavilion: but De Mouy, who, as we have seen, was awaiting the king at the end of the *Allée des Violettes*, had seen these red scarfs stealing along, and instantly suspected them. He hastily concealed himself, and remarked the vast circle they made in order to beat the forest and hem in the place of rendezvous. At the same moment, at the bottom of the principal alley, he had seen the white aigrettes and bright arquebusses of the king's body-guard, and then the king himself, whilst in the opposite direction he observed the King of Navarre. Then he had made a sign of a cross with his hat, which was the signal agreed upon when all was lost. At this signal the king turned back, and rapidly disappeared. Then De Mouy, digging the two large rowels of his spurs into the sides of his horse, fled like the wind, and as he fled, gave those words of advice to La Mole and Coconnas which we have mentioned.

But the king, perceiving the absence of Henry and Marguerite, had arrived, escorted by D'Alençon, to see them both come from the hut, where he had desired all to be shut up who were found, not only in the pavilion, but in the forest.

D'Alençon, full of confidence, galloped close by the king, whose excessive pain increased his ill humor. Twice or thrice he had nearly fainted, and once had vomited blood.

"Quick, quick!" he said, when he arrived. "Make haste; I want to return to the Louvre. Draw these rebels out of their lair. This is Saint Blaise's day, and he was cousin to Saint Bartholomew."

At these words of the king, all the pikes and arquebusses were in motion, and they compelled the Huguenots arrested in the forest or the pavilion to come out of the hut one after the other. But the King of Navarre, Marguerite, and De Mouy were not amongst them.

"Well," said the king, "where is Henry—where is Margot? You promised them to me, D'Alençon, and, *corbœuf!* I must have them found."

"We have not seen the King and Queen of Navarre, sire," said M. de Nancey.

"But here they come," observed Madame ne Nevers.

And at the same moment, at the further extremity of an alley which led down to the river, appeared Henry and Marguerite, both as calm as if nothing had happened; both with their falcons on their wrist, and lovingly side by side on their horses, as they galloped along, whilst their steeds, like themselves, seemed to be caressing each other.

It was then that D'Alençon, furious, commanded the forests to be searched, and that La Mole and Coconnas were discovered.

They had reached the circle which the guards closed in; only, as they were not sovereigns, they could not assume so cool an appearance as Henry and Marguerite. La Mole was too pale, and Coconnas was too red.

CHAPTER LII.

THE EXAMINATIONS.

THE spectacle which presented itself to the friends, as they entered, was one of those that, once seen, is never forgotten.

As we have already said, Charles had anxiously observed each prisoner as, one by one, they left the piqueur's hut, watching, with an earnestness equal to that felt by D'Alençon, to see the King of Navarre come forth.

Both were doomed to disappointment; but, though thus out in their calculation, there still remained something to be done, and that was to find the cause of those being absent they counted upon finding there.

When, therefore, Henry and Marguerite were seen approaching from the end of an alley, a mortal paleness seized D'Alençon, while the breast of Charles seemed relieved from a load, and his heart beat with a hope that his friend Harry might yet disprove all that had been urged against him.

"He will escape again!" murmured François.

But at this moment the king was seized with such excruciating pains, such spasmodic agony throughout his frame, that, pressing a hand on each side, he shrieked aloud like a delirious man.

Henry hastened towards him, but by the time he had traversed the short space that separated them, the paroxysm had passed away.

"From whence come you?" inquired the king, with a sternness of manner that frightened Marguerite.

"Nay, brother," replied she, as though the question had been applied to herself; "we have been joining in the chase."

"Had it been so, you would have pursued the river's side, instead of seeking the recesses of the forest."

"Sire," said Henry, "my falcon suddenly struck down a pheasant, at the very time we had stopped to look after the heron."

"Have you the bird?"

"Behold it, sire—as fine a bird as I have seen!" replied Henry, with the most perfect air of well-assumed innocence, as he held up his beautiful prize.

"Ah, ah!" exclaimed Charles; "but why did you not rejoin me when you had secured the pheasant?"

"Because the bird had directed his flight towards the park, sire; so that when we returned to the river's side, we saw you more than a mile off proceeding towards the forest. Therefore, having been permitted to join your majesty's chase, we did not like being thrown out, and proceeded to gallop after you as fast as we could."

"And were all these gentlemen invited also?" inquired Charles.

"What gentlemen?" inquired Henry, casting a look of inquiry around him.

"*Pardieu!*" exclaimed Charles; "why, your Huguenot friends. All I can say is, that they certainly cannot boast of my invitation to join our sport."

"Probably, sire," answered Henry, "they come at the bidding of M. d'Alençon."

"I?" said the Duke d'Alençon.

"Why, yes, brother," returned Henry; "did you not announce yourself yesterday as King of Navarre? What can be more natural than that the grateful people have assembled here to thank you for accepting the crown, and the king for giving it? Is it not so, gentlemen?"

"Yes, yes!" shouted forth a number of voices. "Long live the Duke d'Alençon! long live King Charles!"

"I am not king of the Huguenots!" said François, perfectly white with rage; and, looking stealthily at Charles, he added, "and trust I never shall be!"

"No matter," interposed Charles; "but you must be very sure, Henry, that I look upon all this as very strange."

"Sire," cried the King of Navarre, firmly, "heaven pardon me for saying such a thing, but most persons would say I was undergoing an examination."

"And if it were so, how would you answer?"

"That I am a king like yourself," replied Henry, proudly; "for it is not the crown, but birth, that confers royalty; and that, though I would cheerfully answer any questions asked by my friend and brother, I should peremptorily refuse to reply to my judge."

"I only wish," muttered Charles, "that for once in my life I could hit upon what it was right to do."

"M. de Mouy is doubtless among those persons secured," cried the Duke d'Alençon. "Let him be brought before your majesty; we shall then know all we require."

"Is M. de Mouy among the prisoners?" inquired the king.

Henry felt a momentary uneasiness, and exchanged glances with Marguerite; but it was quickly dispersed.

No voice answered to the inquiry of De Mouy.

That individual is not among the parties arrested," said M. de Nancey; "some of my men fancy they saw him, but no one is certain on the subject."

An oath escaped from the lips of D'Alençon.

"Ha!" cried Marguerite, pointing to La Mole and Coconnas, who had heard all that had passed, and on whose wit and intelligence she felt sure she might reckon; "here, sire, are two gentlemen in the service of M. D'Alençon; question them—they will reply to you."

The duke felt the blow.

"I had them arrested purposely, to be enabled to prove that they neither of them belonged to me," answered the duke.

The king contemplated the two friends, and started at seeing La Mole again.

"What! that Provençal here?" said he, frowning.

Coconnas bowed most respectfully.

"What were you doing when you were arrested?" asked Charles.

"Sire, myself and friend were busily engaged planning deeds of love and war."

"What, with horses ready saddled, armed to the teeth, and every preparation made for flight?"

"Not so, sire! replied Coconnas; "your majesty is misinformed on this subject. We were lying beneath a sheltering beech, sub tegmine fagi, and might easily have ridden away had we entertoined the slightest suspicion that we had been so unfortunate as to offend your majesty. Now, gentlemen," continued he, turning towards the light horsemen, "say, candidly and fairly, on your honor as soldiers, could we or could we not have escaped, had such been our desire?"

"Truth compels me to declare," answered the lieutenant, "that neither of these cavaliers made the slightest attempt at flight."

"Because, in all probability, their horses were too far off," chimed in the Duke d'Alençon.

"Your pardon, my lord duke," responded Coconnas, "but our horses could scarcely be nearer than they were I being upon mine, and M. de la Mole holding his, in the very act of mounting."

"Is this correct?" inquired the king.

"Perfectly so," replied the lieutenant; "and more, upon seeing us approach, M. de Coconnas got off his horse."

Coconnas looked at the king with a sort of grim smile, that seemed to say, "There, you see!"

"But what did all those led horses, those mules laden with cases and packages, signify, then?" demanded François.

"How can we tell you?" replied Coconnas; "we are neither grooms nor squires. Ask these questions of the varlet who had charge of them."

"He is not to be found!" exclaimed the duke, almost frantic with rage.

"Most likely he was frightened, and ran away," retorted Coconnas; "one cannot expect a clown to have the notions or manners of a gentleman."

"Still the same system," said D'Alençon, gnashing his teeth; "fortunately, sire, I told you beforehand that neither of these persons had been in my service for some days past."

"Is it possible," cried Coconnas, "that I have the misfortune no longer to form part of your highness's retinue?"

"*Morbleu!* monsieur, why affect ignorance on this subject, when you yourself gave in your dismissal in a letter so impertinent that I have thought proper to preserve it, and happily have it about me."

"I confess," said Coconnas, "I had flattered myself with the hope of being forgiven for writing that letter, under the first influence of vexation at learning that your highness had endeavored to strangle my friend La Mole in one of the corridors of the Louvre."

"What is that he says?" interrupted the king.

"At first I thought your highness was alone in the affair; but afterwards I learned that three other persons——"

"Silence!" exclaimed Charles, "we have heard enough." Then, turning to the King of Navarre, he said, "Henry, your word not to escape."

"I give it to your majesty."

"Return to Paris with M. de Nancey, and remain in your chamber under arrest. As for you, messieurs," continued he, speaking to the two friends, "give up your swords."

La Mole looked at Marguerite, who smiled; the young man immediately delivered his sword to the nearest officer. Coconnas following his friend's example.

"Has M. de Mouy been found?" inquired the king.

"No, sire," answered M. de Nancey; "either he was not in the forest, or he has escaped."

"So much the worse," rejoined Charles; "but let us return to Paris. I am cold, and my head seems dizzy."

"'Tis anger that excites you, sire," observed François.

"It may be; but my eyes seem troubled. Where are the prisoners? I cannot distinguish anything. Is it so soon dark? Oh, mercy! help—help—I die!—I die!"

So saying, the unfortunate king let go the reins of his horse, and fell backwards, wildly stretching forth his hands; while his terrified courtiers, alarmed at this sudden seizure, prevented him from falling.

Standing apart from the clustering nobles, François wiped the cold drops from his brow; for he alone of all the company knew the cause of Charles's violent attack.

The king was now quite insensible. A litter was brought, and he being extended on it, was covered with a cloak taken from the shoulders of one of his attendants.

The melancholy procession then proceeded towards Paris, in a very different frame of mind to that in which it had departed thence in the morning. Then, a merry, jocund party had set forth, consisting of conspirators whose hearts beat high with hope, and a joyous monarch, promising himself many such days of princely enjoyment: their return displayed a dying king surrounded by rebel prisoners.

Marguerite, who throughout all this had not for an instant lost her self-possession, gave her husband a look of intelligence, then, passing so close to La Mole that he was enabled to catch the two brief words she uttered, she said :

"*Me deide.*" ("Fear nothing.")

"Now, gentlemen," exclaimed the captain of light horse, "we are ready to start."

"Would it be a liberty," inquired Coconnas, "to ask where we are going to ?"

"I believe to Vincennes," replied the lieutenant.

"I would rather be going anywhere else," answered Coconnas ; "but people are sometimes obliged to do things against their will."

The king recovered his senses during the journey, and even a portion of his strength : he declared himself equal to remounting his horse, but that was not permitted.

"Let Maître Ambroise Paré be immediately summoned," said Charles, as he reached the Louvre. Then, descending from his litter, he walked slowly towards his apartments leaning on the arm of Tavannes, and strictly forbidding any persons following him.

All had observed his extreme gravity of look and manner. During the journey homewards, he had appeared lost in reflection, not addressing a word to those around him. Still it was evident, that the recently discovered conspiracy formed no part of his thoughts, but that he was solely occupied with his own illness—a malady so strange, so sudden and severe, and the symptoms of which reminded the spectators of those visible in the last sickness of François II.

Arrived at his chamber, Charles seated himself on a species of chaise-longue, and supported his head on the cushions : then, reflecting that there might be some little delay ere the arrival of Maître Ambroise Paré he determined to employ the intermediate space as well as he could. He clapped his hands—a guard appeared.

Let the King of Navarre be informed I desire to speak with him," said Charles.

The man bowed, and departed.

Again was the king visited by a repetition of the distressing sufferings he had previously undergone ; his head fell back ; his ideas seemed crowded and confused, till he could not separate one from the other ; a sort of blood-colored vapor seemed to float before his eyes ; his mouth was parched, and he fruitlessly sought to slake the burning thirst by which he was consumed by swallowing the contents of a carafe of water.

During the almost lethargic state into which Charles had sunk, a sudden noise was heard of approaching footsteps ; the door rolled back on its hinges, and Henry stood before him.

"You sent for me, sire," said he. "I am here."

The sound of the well-known voice effectively roused Charles, who, raising his languid head mechanically, held out his hand to Henry.

"Sire," observed Henry, whose arms hung beside him, without any attempt to imitate the offered cordiality on the part of the king, "your majesty forgets that I am no longer your brother, but your prisoner."

"True, true," answered Charles, "and I thank you for having reminded me of it ; but was there not also some promise on your part, when we last spoke together, to answer me candidly whatever questions I might put to you ?"

"I did so pledge myself to your majesty, and I am ready to keep my word."

The king poured some water into the palm of his hand and applied it to his temples.

"First, then," said he, "tell me truly, Henry, how much of the charge brought against you by the Duke d'Alençon is correct ?"

"Half of it. It was M. d'Alençon who was to have fled, and I who was to have accompanied him."

"And why should you have done so, Henry ? Are you dissatisfied with my conduct towards you ?"

"Far from it, sire. Your majesty is all goodness ; and that God, to whom the secrets of all men's hearts are known, knows well how truly and affectionately I love and honor my king and brother."

"Yet," said Charles, "methinks 'tis not usual to fly from those we love, and who love us."

"Your majesty is right in so believing; but 'twas not from those I loved I sought to escape, but from such as hated me, and desired my ruin. Am I permited to speak openly?"

"You are—proceed."

"The persons whose animosity I dreaded and wished to fly from were M. d'Alençon and the queen-mother."

"As for M. d'Alençon, I will not say you are wrong; but the queen-mother loads you with attentions."

"And 'tis precisely for that reason I mistrust her; and a very good thing it is I was on my guard."

"Against the queen-mother?"

"Aye, the queen-mother, or those who are about her. Now, will your majesty tell me as candidly as I have answered the questions put to me, whether my life is of any value in your eyes?"

"I should be miserable if any harm were to befall you."

"Well, then, I can assure your majesty you have twice very narrowly escaped being made miserable on my account. Twice has Providence interposed in my behalf. Certainly, upon one occasion Providence thought fit to assume the features of your majesty."

"And who was your preserver upon the other occasion?"

"A very unlikely person to be selected as a providential agent for good: no other than René."

"And what did he for you?"

"He saved me from poison."

"You have all the luck, Harry!" murmured poor Charles, faintly smiling; but the feeble attempt was quickly dispelled by the sharp spasmodic contraction of returning suffering.

The king wiped his brow, and signed to Henry to proceed.

"Well, sire," said Henry, "have I spoken out as boldly as you desired? Is there anything else you are desirous of questioning me upon?"

"Harry, you are a good and faithful fellow. Tell me this—do you apprehend any further attempts on your life or honor on the part of your enemies?"

"I can but assure you, that when evening comes, I am always surprised to find myself still in existence."

"It is because they see I love you, they are thus bitter: but make yourself quite easy. They shall meet with their just reward; meanwhile, you are free."

"To quit Paris?" asked Henry.

"No, no! You are well aware I cannot possibly do without you. *Mille noms d'un diable!* I must have some one to love me, surely."

"Then if your majesty prefers keeping me with you, at least grant me one favor."

"What is that?"

"Not to entertain me as a friend, but to detain me as a prisoner."

"A prisoner, Harry!"

"Nay, does not your majesty see plainly enough that it is your friendship that brings all my troubles and disasters on me?"

"And you would prefer my hatred?"

"I would only desire your feigned dislike, sire. An outward manifestation of displeasure on your part will save me from any further persecution from those who will esteem me of too little consequence to merit their hostility, directly they believe you have disgraced and dismissed me from favor—but your majesty is still suffering from your recent attack; I can perceive the efforts you are making to conceal it. Permit me to summon the necessary aid."

"I have sent for Maître Ambroise Parè."

"Then I shall retire more satisfied."

"Upon my soul," said the king. "I verily believe you are the only person in the world who really loves me!"

"Is such your opinion, sire?"

"It is, on the word of a gentleman."

"Then I pray you to commend me to the strict keeping of M. de Nancey, as a man your extreme anger may doom to death ere a month is past. By that means you will have me to love you for many years."

"M. de Nancey!" cried Charles. The captain of the guards entered. "M. de Nancey," said Charles, "I here commit to your keeping the most guilty man in my kingdom; you will answer for him with your life."

The officer bowed low; and with a well-feigned air of consternation, Henry followed his self-solicited keeper from the apartment.

CHAPTER LIII.

ACTÆON.

Charles was alone, and much astonished not to have seen one or other of his faithful attendants—his nurse Madeleine and his greyhound Actæon.

"Nurse has gone to sing her psalms with some Huguenot of her acquaintance," he said to himself; "and Actæon is still angry with me for the blow I gave him with my whip this morning."

Charles then took a wax candle, and went into the nurse's apartment: she was not there, and he passed on into his armory; but as he went forward, one of those agonies he had already experienced, and which came on him suddenly, seized him. He suffered as if his entrails were perforated with a hot iron; an unquenchable thirst consumed him, and seeing a cup of milk on the table, he swallowed it at a draught, and then felt somewhat easier, and entered the armory.

To his great astonishment, Actæon did not come to meet him—had he been shut up? In that case, he would have known that his master had returned from hunting, and howled to rejoin him.

Charles called—whistled—the animal did not appear.

He advanced four paces, and as the light of the wax candle threw its beams to the angle of the cabinet, he saw, in the corner, a large mass extended on the floor.

"Halo! Actæon, halo!" said Charles, whistling again.

The dog never stirred; Charles hastened forward, and touched him; the poor brute was stiff and cold. From his throat, contracted by pain, several drops of humor had fallen, mingled with a foamy and bloody slaver. The dog had found in the cabinet an old cap of his master's, and had died with his head resting on something that represented a friend.

At this spectacle, which made him forget his own sufferings, and restored him to all his energy, rage boiled in Charles's veins: he would have cried out, but, encompassed in their greatness as they are, kings are not free to yield to that first impulse which every man turns to the profit of his passion or his defense: Charles reflected that there might be some treason here, and was silent.

Then he knelt before his dog, and examined the dead carcase with an experienced eye. The eye was glassy, the tongue red, and covered with pustules; it was a strange disease, and made Charles shudder.

The king put on his gloves, opened the livid lips of the dog to examine the teeth, and remarked, in the interstices, some white-looking fragments clinging about the points of his sharp teeth. He took these fragments out, and at once recognized that they were paper; near where the paper was, the inflammation was more violent, the gums more swollen, and the skin as if eaten by vitriol.

Charles looked around him attentively. On the carpet were lying several pieces of paper similar to that which he had already recognized in the dog's throat; one of the bits, larger than the others, presented the marks of an engraving on wood. Charles's hair stood erect on his head; he recognized a fragment of the engraving which represented a gentleman hawking, and it was that which Actæon had torn out of the book.

"Ah," said he, turning pale, "the book was poisoned!" Then, suddenly calling up his recollections, "*Mille demons!* I touched every page with my finger, and at every page I raised my finger to my lips to moisten it. These faintings—these agonies—these vomitings !—I am a dead man !"

Charles remained for an instant motionless under the weight of this frightful idea ; then, raising himself with a hoarse groan, he went hastily towards the door.

"Let some one go instantly, and with all despatch," he cried, "to Maître René, and bring him here in ten minutes. If Maître Ambroise Paré arrives, desire him to wait."

A guard went instantly to obey the king's commands.

"Ah," muttered Charles, "if I put everybody to the torture, I will learn who gave this book to Harry !" and with the perspiration on his brow, his hands clenched, his breast heaving, Charles remained with his eyes fixed on the body of his dead dog. Ten minutes afterwards, the Florentine rapped timidly at the door. "Enter !" said Charles.

The perfumer appeared, and Charles went up towards him with an imperious air and compressed lip.

"Your majesty desired to see me," said René, trembling.

"Yes ; you are a skilful chemist, are you not ?"

"Sire——"

"And know all that the most skilful doctors know ?"

"Your majesty is pleased to flatter me."

"No, my mother tells me so ; and besides, I have confidence in you, and had rather consult you than any one else. Look !" he continued, pointing to the carcass of the dead dog ; "I beg you to look at that animal's mouth, and tell me of what death he has died."

Whilst René, with a wax candle in his hand, was stooping down to the ground, as much to hide his emotion as to obey the king, Charles, standing up, with his eyes fixed on him, awaited with a feverish expectation, easily to be imagined, the reply, which would be his senteuce of death or his assurance of safety.

René drew a kind of scalpel from his pocket, opened it, and, with the point, detached from the dog's throat the morsels of paper adhering to the gums, looking long and attentively to the humor and blood which distilled from each wound.

"Sire," he said, in a tremulous voice, "here are very sad symptoms."

Charles felt an icy shudder run through his veins, and to his very heart.

"Yes," he exclaimed, "the dog has been poisoned, has he not?"

"I fear so, sire."

"And with what sort of poison?"

"I think a mineral poison."

"Can you ascertain to a certainty whether or not he has been poisoned?"

"Yes, on opening and examining the stomach."

"Open it, then, as I wish to be assured on the point."

"I must call some one to assist me."

"I will assist you," said Charles; "and if he has been poisoned, what symptoms shall we find?"

"Red blotches and herborizations in the stomach."

"Come, then, to work!"

René, with one stroke of the scalpel, opened the hound's body, whilst Charles, with one knee on the ground, lighted him with clenched and convulsive hand.

"See, sire," said René; "see, here are certain marks; here are the red blotches I mentioned, and these veins, turgid with blood, like the roots of certain plants, are what I meant by herborizations. I find here every symptom I anticipated."

"And the dog is assuredly poisoned?"

"Unquestionably, sire."

"With mineral poison?"

"According to every appearance."

"And what would be a man's symptoms, who by accident had swallowed such poison?"

"Great pains in the head, a feeling of burning in the stomach, as if he had swallowed hot coals, pains in the bowels, and vomiting."

"Would he be thirsty?" asked Charles.

"Parchingly thirsty."

"'Tis so, then—'tis so, then," muttered the king; and aloud he asked, "What is the antidote to administer to a man who had swallowed the same substance as my dog?"

René reflected an instant. "There are many mineral poisons," he replied, "and I should like to know precisely which your majesty means. Has your majesty any idea of the mode in which the poison was conveyed to the dog?"

"Yes," said Charles; "he has eaten the leaf of a book."

"The leaf of a book?"

"Yes."

"And has your majesty got that book?"

"Here it is," was Charles's answer, taking the hunting-book from the shelf where he had placed it, and handing it to René, who gave a start of surprise, which did not escape the king.

"He has eaten a leaf of this book?" stammered René.

"Yes, this one;" and Charles pointed out the torn leaf.

"Allow me to tear out another, sire."

"Do so."

René tore out a leaf, held it in the wax candle, and when it caught light, a strong smell of garlic diffused itself through the apartment. "He has been poisoned with a preparation of arsenic," he said.

"You are sure?"

"As if I had prepared it myself."

"And the antidote?" René shook his head.

"What!" said Charles, in a hoarse voice, "do you know no remedy?"

"The best and most efficacious is white of eggs beaten in milk; but——"

"But what?"

"It must be instantly administered; if not——"

"If not——"

"It is a subtle poison, sire," replied René.

"Yet it does not kill at once," said Charles.

"No, but it kills surely: no matter as to the length of time the person is in dying, though sometimes that may be reduced to a calculation."

Charles leaned on the marble table. "Now," said he, touching René on the shoulder, "you know this book."

"I, sire!" replied Renè, turning pale.

"Yes, you; for you betrayed yourself as your looked at it."

"Sire, I swear to you——"

"Listen to me, René, and listen attentively. You poisoned the Queen of Navarre with gloves; you poisoned the Prince de Porcian with the smoke of a lamp; you tried to poison M. de Condé with a scented apple. René, I will have your flesh torn off your bones, shred by shred, with red-hot pincers, if you do not tell me to whom this book belongs."

The Florentine saw that he must not trifle with Charles's anger, and resolved to reply with audacity.

"And if I tell the truth, sire, who will guarantee me from not being more cruelly tortured than if I hold my tongue?"

"I will."

"Will you give me your royal word?"

"On my honor as a gentleman, your life shall be spared," said the king.

"Then this book belongs to me."

"To you?" replied Charles, starting, and gazing on him with bewildered eye.

"Yes, to me."

"And how did it leave your hands?"

"Her majesty the queen-mother took it from my house."

"The queen-mother?" exclaimed Charles.

"Yes."

"And with what intention?"

"With the intention, as I believe, of having it sent to the King of Navarre, who had inquired of the Duke d'Alençon for a book of this description to study hawking from."

"Ah!" said Charles, "and is that it? I understand it all. This book, indeed, was in Harry's chamber. There is a destiny, and I submit to it."

At this moment, Charles was seized with a cough so dry and violent as to agonize him, and bring on a fresh attack of pain in the stomach ; he uttered two or three stifled groans, and fell into a chair.

"What ails you, sire ?" asked René,alarmed.

"Nothing," said Charles, "except great thirst. Give me something to drink."

René poured out a glass of water, and presented it to Charles, who swallowed it at a draught.

"Now," said he, taking a pen, and dropping it into the ink, "write in this book."

"What shall I write ?"

"What I dictate : 'This book on hawking was given by me to the queen-mother Catherine de Medicis. RENE.'"

The Florentine wrote and signed as he was commanded.

"You promised my life should be saved," said René.

"And on my part I will keep my word."

"But," said René, "as to the queen-mother !"

"Oh," replied Charles, "that I have nothing to do with. It you are attacked, defend yourself."

"Sire, may I quit France when I find my life menaced ?"

"I will reply to that in fifteen days hence ; in the meantime——"

And Charles frowningly placed his finger on his livid lips.

"Rely on me, sire," said René, who, too happy to escape so well, bowed, and left the room.

Behind him the nurse appeared at her chamber door.

"What is the matter, my Charlot ?" she inquired.

"Nurse, I have been walking in the dew, and it has given me cold."

"You look very pale, Charlot."

"And feel very weak. Give me your arm, nurse, and help me to bed ;" and leaning on her, Charles went to his chamber.

"Now," said Charles, "I will put myself to bed."

"And if Maître Ambroise Paré comes ?"

"You must tell him I am better, and do not want him."

"But, meanwhile, what will you take?"

"Oh, a very simple medicine—whites of eggs beaten in milk. By the way, nurse, poor Actæon is dead; to-morrow morning have him buried in a corner of the garden of the Louvre; he was one of my best friends, and I will raise a tomb over him, if I have time."

CHAPTER LIV.

VINCENNES.

ACCORDING to the order given by Charles IX., Henry was the same evening conducted to Vincennes, that famous castle of which only a fragment now remains, but colossal enough to give an idea of its past grandeur.

At the postern of the prison they stopped. M. de Nancey alighted from his horse, opened the gate closed with a padlock, and respectfully invited the king to follow him. Henry obeyed without a word of reply. Every abode seemed to him more safe than the Louvre, and ten doors closing on him at the same time, were between him and Catherine de Medicis.

The royal prisoner crossed the drawbridge between two soldiers, passed the three doors on the ground floor and the three doors at the foot of the staircase, and then, still preceded by M. de Nancey, went up one flight of stairs. Arrived there, Captain de Nancey requested the king to follow him through a kind of corridor, at the extremity of which was a very large and gloomy chamber.

Henry looked around him with considerable disquietude.

"Where are we?" he inquired.

"In the chamber of torture, monseigneur."

"Ah, ah!" replied the king, looking at it attentively.

There was something of everything in this apartment: pitchers and trestles for the torture by water; wedges and mallets for the question of the boot; moreover, there were stone benches for the unhappy wretches who awaited the question, nearly all round the chamber; and above these seats, and to the seats themselves, and at the foot of these seats, were iron rings, morticed into the walls with no symmetry but that of the torturing art.

"Ah, ah!" said Henry, "is this the way to my apartment?"

"Yes, monseigneur, and here it is," said a figure in the dark, who approached and then became distinguishable.

Henry thought he recognized the voice, and advancing towards the individual, said: "Ah, is it you, Beaulieu? And what the devil do you do here?"

"Sire, I have been nominated governor of the fortress of Vincennes."

"Well, my dear sir, your début does you honor; a king for a prisoner is no bad commencement."

"Pardon me, sire, but before I received you I had already received two gentlemen."

"Who may they be? Ah, your pardon! Perhaps I commit an indiscretion?"

"Monseigneur, I have not been bound to secrecy. They are M. de la Mole and M. de Coconnas."

"Poor gentlemen! And where are they?"

"High up; on the fourth floor."

Henry gave a sigh. It was there he wished to be.

"Now, then, M. de Beaulieu," said Henry, "have the kindness to show me my chamber. I am desirous of reaching it, as I am very much fatigued with my day's toil."

"Here, monseigneur," said Beaulieu, showing Henry an open door.

"No. 2!" said Henry, "and why not No. 1?"

"Because it is reserved, monseigneur."

"Ah, that is another thing," said Henry, and he became even more pensive. He wondered who was to occupy No. 1.

The governor, with a thousand apologies, installed Henry in his apartment, made many excuses for his deficiencies, and placing two soldiers at the door, retired.

"Now," said the governor, addressing the turnkey, "let us visit the others."

The turnkey preceded him, and traversing the Salle de

Question, they again passed the corridor, and reaching the staircase, M. de Beaulieu followed his guide up three pair of stairs. On reaching the fourth story, the turnkey opened successively three doors, each ornamented with two locks and three enormous bolts. He had scarcely touched the third door than they heard a joyous voice, which exclaimed :

"Eh, *mordi!* open, if it be only to give us a little air! Your stove is so warm, that it stifles me here."

"One moment, my gentleman," said the turnkey; "I have not come to let you out, but to come in to you with the governor."

"M. the Governor does me great honor," replied Coconnas, "and is most welcome."

M. de Beaulieu then entered, and answered Coconnas's cordial smile by one of those icy politenesses which belong to governors of fortresses, jailers, and executioners.

"Have you any money, sir?" he inquired of his prisoner.

"I?" replied Coconnas. "Not a crown."

"Jewels?"

"I have a ring."

"Allow me to search you."

"*Mordi!*" cried Coconnas, reddening with anger.

"We must suffer everything for the service of the king!"

"Humph!" replied the Piedmontese, "they who rob on the Pont-Neuf are, then, like you, in the service of the king. *Mordi!* I have been very unjust, sir; for until now I had taken them for thieves."

"Sir, good day!" said Beaulieu. "Jailer, lock the door!"

The governor went away, taking with him the ring, a beautiful sapphire which Madame de Nevers had given to Coconnas to remind him of the color of her eyes.

"Now for the other," he said, as he went out.

They crossed an empty apartment, and the game of three doors, six locks, and nine bolts, was played all over again. The last door being opened, a sigh was the first sound that saluted the visitors. The chamber was even more gloomy than the one which M. de Beaulieu had just quitted. La Mole was seated in a corner, his head resting on his hand, and in spite of the visit and the visitors, was as motionless as if he did not observe them.

"Good evening, M. de la Mole," said Beaulieu.

The young man raised his head slowly.

"Good evening, sir," he replied.

"Sir," continued Beaulieu, "I have come to search you."

"It is useless," replied La Mole; "I will give you all I have."

"What have you?"

"About three hundred crowns, these jewels, these rings."

La Mole turned out his pockets, stripped his fingers, and took the clasp out of his hat.

"Have you nothing more?"

"Not that I know of."

"And that silk cord round your neck, what may that be?" asked the governor.

"Sir, it is not a jewel; it is a relic."

"You must give it to me."

"Really, do you require it? Well then, sir, here it is."

Then turning away, as if to approach the light, he unfastened the pretended relic, which was in fact a medallion containing a portrait. The latter he took out of its case, pressed it to his lips, and having kissed it many times, pretended to drop it accidentally, and placing the heel of his boot upon it, crushed it to atoms.

"Sir," said Beaulieu, when he saw the miniature literally ground to dust, "I shall complain of this to the king."

And without taking leave of his prisoner in a single word, he withdrew so angry that he left the turnkey to fasten the doors. The jailer advanced a few paces, and observing that M. de Beaulieu had already descended several stairs, he said, turning to La Mole:

"*Ma foi!* sir, it was very well you gave me the hundred crowns at once, for which I am to give you leave to see and talk with your companion; for if you had not, the governor would have taken them with the other three hundred, and my conscience would then not have allowed me to do anything for you; but I have been paid in advance, and have promised you shall see your comrade, and an honest man always keeps his word: only, if you can avoid it, for your own sake as well as mine, do not talk politics."

La Mole came forth from his apartment, and found himself face to face with Coconnas, who was walking up and down the flags of the intermediate chamber. The two friends threw themselves into each other's arms. The jailer pretended to wipe the corner of his eye, and then withdrew, to watch that the prisoners were not surprised, or rather, himself not suspected.

"Ah, 'tis you, then!" said Coconnas. "Has that brute of a governor visited you?"

"Yes, and you too, I presume?"

"And taken everything from you?"

"And from you too, eh?"

"Oh, I had not much—only a ring Henriette gave me."

"Have you any idea what has happened?"

"Perfectly; we have been betrayed."

"By whom?"

"By that scoundrelly Duke d'Alençon. I should have been right to twist his neck, you see."

"And do you think our position is serious?"

"I am afraid so."

"Then we may have to anticipate the torture?"

"I have already thought so."

"And what shall you do in that case?"

"And you?"

"I shall be silent," replied La Mole, with a fevered blush, "if I can."

"And I," said Coconnas, "will tell them a few things they do not expect."

"What things?" asked La Mole, eagerly.

"Oh, be easy—things that will prevent M. d'Alençon from sleeping quietly for some time."

La Mole was about to reply, when the jailer, who no doubt heard some noise, came suddenly into the chamber, and pushing each into his respective dungeon, locked them in again.

CHAPTER LV.

THE FIGURE OF WAX.

For a week Charles was confined to his bed by a slow fever, interrupted by fits like epilepsy. During these attacks his cries were terrible; then, when they were over, he sank back exhausted into the arms of his nurse. Henry was shut up in his chamber at the prison, and, at his own request to Charles, no one was allowed to see him, not even Marguerite. Catherine and D'Alençon thought him lost: Henry himself ate and drank more at his ease, hoping he was forgotten. At court no one suspected the real cause of the king's illness. Maître Ambroise Paré and Mazille, his colleague, believed it to be inflammation of the coats of the stomach, and had prescribed a regimen which aided the operation of the drink prescribed by René, and which Charles received thrice a day from the hands of his nurse; it was the only nourishment he took.

La Mole and Coconnas were at Vincennes in close confinement. Marguerite and Madame de Nevers had made several attempts to see them or to send them a letter, but in vain.

One morning Charles felt rather better, and ordered the court should be admitted. The doors were accordingly opened, and it was easy to see, by his pale cheeks and the feverish glare of his eyes, what great ravages disease had made on the young king.

Catherine, D'Alençon, and Marguerite were informed that the king gave audience. They all three entered at a short interval one after the other: Catherine calm, D'Alençon smiling, Marguerite dejected: Catherine sat down by the side of the bed without remarking the look Charles gave her; D'Alençon stood at the foot; Marguerite leaned against a table. On seeing her brother thus worn by illness, she could not repress a sigh and a tear.

Charles, whom nothing escaped, saw the tear and heard the sigh, and made a motion of his head to Marguerite, unseen by all but her. This sign, slight as it was, gave courage to the poor queen, to whom Henry had not had time, or perhaps had not chosen, to say anything. She feared for her husband, she trembled for her lover. For herself she had no fear; she knew La Mole too well not to feel that she might fully rely upon him.

"Well, my dear son," said Catherine, "how are you now?"

"Better, madame, better."

"And what say the physicians?"

"Oh, my physicians, they are very clever fellows," cried Charles, bursting into a discordant laugh; "I have great amusement in listening to their discussions about my malady."

"What my brother wants," observed François, "is to take the fresh air. The chase, which he is so fond of, would do him good."

"And yet," replied Charles, with a singular smile, "the last did me a great deal of harm."

Then, with an inclination of his head, he signified to the courtiers that the audience was at an end. D'Alençon bowed and withdrew. Margaret seized Charles's wasted hand and kissed it tenderly, then left the apartment.

"Dear Margot!" murmured Charles.

Catherine remained; and Charles, seeing her alone with him, recoiled as if from a serpent. He knew to whom and to what his death was attributable. "Why do you stay, madame?" asked he with a shudder.

"I wish to speak to you of important matters, my son," returned Catherine.

"Speak, madame," said Charles.

"Sire, you said just now your doctors were very skilful."

"I say so still."

"Well—I suspect that, clever as they are, they know nothing at all about your disorder."

"Really, madame?"

"And that they treat the symptoms, instead of treating the cause."

"On my soul," replied Charles, astonished, "I think you are right!"

"Well, my son," continued Catherine, "as it is essential for my happiness and for the welfare of the kingdom you should be cured as speedily as possible, I have assembled all the men skilled, not only in curing the diseases of the body, but those of the mind."

"What was the result?"

"That which I expected; I have the remedy that will cure not only your body, but your mind."

Charles trembled; he thought that his mother intended to give him a fresh poison, finding the first too slow in operation.

"Where is this remedy?" asked he.

"In the disease itself."

"Where is that situated?"

"Listen, my son," said the queen· "Did you never hear of secret enemies, who from a distance assassinate their victim?"

"By steel or poison?" demanded Charles, without changing the expression of his countenance.

"My son," asked the Florentine, "do you believe in magic?"

"Fully," returned Charles, repressing a smile of incredulity.

"Well, then," continued Catherine, "from magic proceed all your sufferings. An enemy, who dared not attack you openly, has done so in secret; a terrible conspiracy, the more terrible that it was without accomplices, has been directed against your majesty."

"Oh, oh," said Charles.

"You doubt it, perhaps; but I know it for a certainty."

"I never doubt what you tell me," replied the king, sarcastically. "I am curious to know how they have sought to kill me."

"By magic."

"Explain yourself."

"If the conspirator I mean, and whom your majesty suspects already in your mind, had succeeded, there would have been no trace, but happily your brother watched over you."

"What brother?"

"D'Alençon."

"Ah! true," said Charles, with a bitter laugh, "I forgot I had a brother. Well, continue, madame."

"He fortunately discovered the clue to the conspirator."

"Ah! I suppose you mean the King of Navarre, mother?" replied Charles, wishing to see how far her dissimulation would go.

Catherine hypocritically cast down her eyes.

"I have had him arrested and sent to Vincennes for his escapade," continued the king. "Is he more culpable than I suspected, then?"

"Do you feel the fever that consumes you?" asked Catherine.

"Yes," replied Charles, his brow darkening.

"Do you feel the fire that burns your stomach?"

"Aye, madame."

"Do you feel the shooting pains in your head?"

"Yes: how exactly you understand the symptoms."

"Well, look here"——And she drew from under her mantle a little figure. The figure was of yellow wax, about ten inches high, clothed in a robe covered with golden stars, also of wax, and over this a royal mantle of the same material.

"What is this statue?" asked Charles.

"See what it has on the head," said Catherine.

"A crown," replied Charles.

"And in the heart——"

"A needle."

"Well——"

"Well, do you recognize yourself?"

"Myself!"

"Yes, in your royal robes, with the crown on your head."

"And who made this figure?" asked the king, weary of the miserable farce. "The King of Navarre, of course."

"No, sire."

"No; then I do not understand you."

"I say *no,*" replied Catherine, "because you may ask the question literally; had you put it in a different manner, I should have answered yes."

Charles made no answer.

"Sire" continued she, "this statue was found by the attorney-general, Laguesle, in the apartment of the man who led a horse for the King of Navarre on the day of the hawking party."

"M. de la Mole?"

"Himself. Now look at the needle in the heart, and the name written on the label attached to it."

"I see an M," returned Charles.

"That means '*mort;*' it is the magic formula."

"So, then, the person who seeks to kill me is M. de la Mole?" said Charles.

"Yes, he is the poniard; but behind the poniard is the hand that directs it."

"This, then, is the cause of my illness? What must now be done? for you know that, unlike you, I know nothing of charms and spells."

"The death of the conspirator destroys the charm. Its power ceases with his life."

"Really."

"Did you not know that?"

"I am no sorcerer."

"But now you are convinced, are you not, of the cause of your illness?"

"Completely."

"You do not say so out of complaisance?"

"Oh, no! from the bottom of my heart."

"Heaven be praised," said Catherine.

"Yes, Heaven be praised," repeated Charles, ironically. "I know the cause of my illness, and whom to punish."

"And you will punish——"

"M. de la Mole; you say he is the guilty party."

"I say he is the instrument."

"Well, we will begin with him, and if he has an accomplice, he will confess."

"If he does not," muttered Catherine, "I have infallible means of making him. You will then, sire, permit the process to commence?"

"I desire it, madame, and the sooner the better."

Catherine pressed her son's hand, not at all understanding the nervous pressure with which he returned it, and left the apartment without hearing his sardonic laugh, or the terrible imprecation which followed that laugh. At this moment he heard a rustling noise, and, turning round, saw Marguerite lifting the tapestry of the door of the nurse's apartments.

"Oh, sire, sire!" cried Marguerite, "you know what *she* says is false."

"*She!* Who?" said Charles.

"Oh, Charles! it is terrible to accuse one's mother; I knew she was staying only to persecute him; but I swear to you, by all I hold sacred, that what she says is false."

"Whom does she persecute?"

"Henry, your own Henry, who loves you, and is devoted to you."

"You think so, Margot?"

"I am sure of it."

"And so am I."

"Why, then, did you arrest him, and send him to Vincennes?" said Marguerite.

"Oh, he has singular ideas; perhaps he is wrong, perhaps he is right; but he thought he should be more safe in disgrace than in favor, at Vincennes than in the Louvre, and so he asked me to arrest him."

"Is he safe?"

"As safe as a man can be, for whose life Beaulieu answers with his own."

"Oh, thanks! but——"

"But what?"

"There is another person in whose welfare I am interested."

"Who is this person?"

"Sire, spare me; I scarce dare name him to my brother, much less to my king."

"M. de la Mole, is it not?"

"Alas! sire, you wished once before to kill him, and he only escaped by a miracle."

"He had committed but one crime then, now he has committed two."

"Ah! he is not guilty of the second."

"But do you not know what our mother says?"

"I have already told you what she says is false."

"Do you not know that a figure dressed in royal robes, and pierced to the heart, has been seized at De la Mole's?"

"I know it, but it was the figure of a woman, not of a man."

"And the needle——"

"Was a charm to make himself beloved by a woman, not to kill a man."

"What was the name of this woman?"

"MARGUERITE!" cried the queen, casting herself at Charles's bedside, and bathing his hand with tears.

"Silence, Margot," said Charles, "you may, in your turn, be overheard."

"Oh, no matter!" cried the queen. "If all the world were present to hear me, I would declare it infamous to abuse the love of a gentleman by staining his reputation with a charge of murder."

"What if I knew the real author of the crime?"

"Brother——"

"That it was not La Mole."

"You know then——"

"The real author of the crime."

"There has been a crime committed, then?"

"Yes."

"Impossible!"

"Look at me."

Marguerite obeyed, and shuddered as she saw him so pale.

"I have not three months to live!"

"*You*, my brother!"

"Margot, I am poisoned!"

Marguerite screamed.

"Silence," said Charles; "it must be thought I die by magic."

"You know who is guilty."

"Yes."

"Who is it? D'Alençon?"

"Perhaps."

"Or," Marguerite whispered, as if alarmed at what she was going to say, "our mother?"

Charles remained silent. Marguerite, however, read the answer in his eye, and sank into a chair.

"My God!" murmured she. "It is impossible!"

"Impossible?" said Charles. "It is a pity René is not here."

"René?"

"Yes; he would tell you all about it: 'twas a book he lent to his mistress that was poisoned, and that has poisoned me. But this must be hidden from the world, and that it may be so, it must be believed I die of magic, and by the agency of him they accuse."

"But it is monstrous!" exclaimed Marguerite. "Pardon! pardon! You know he is innocent!"

"I know it, but the world must believe him guilty. Let your lover die: his death alone can save the honor of our family. I myself die that the secret may be preserved."

Marguerite saw her only hope lay in her own resources, and withdrew, weeping. Meantime, Catherine had lost not an instant, but had written to Laguesle the following historical letter, which we give word for word, and which throws a considerable light on this bloody drama :

"M. le Procureur,—I have this evening been informed for certain that La Mole has committed sacrilege ; many ill books and papers have been found in his apartments in Paris ; see, therefore, the chief president, and inform him of the whole affair ; of the waxen figure meant for the king, and which they have pierced to the heart.

"Catherine."

CHAPTER LVI.

THE INVISIBLE BUCKLERS.

The day after that on which Catherine had written this letter, the governor entered Coconnas's cell with an imposing cortége of two halberdiers and four black-gowned men.

Coconnas was invited to descend into the room where Laguesle and two judges waited to interrogate him, according to Catherine's intructions.

During the eight days he had passed in prison, Coconnas had reflected deeply ; besides that, he and La Mole, seeing each other daily, had agreed on the conduct they were to pursue, which was to persist in an absolute denial, and they were persuaded that with a little address the affair would take a more favorable turn. Coconnas was ignorant that Henry was in the same prison with themselves, and the complaisance of his jailer told him that over his head there was extended protection, which he called "invisible bucklers."

Up to this time, the interrogations had been confined to the designs of the King of Navarre, his projects of flight, and the part the two friends had borne in these projects. Coconnas had constantly replied in a way more than vague, and much more than adroit, and he was ready still to reply in a similar manner, and had prepared beforehand all his little repartees, when he suddenly found the object of the interrogatory to be altered.

It was now directed to several visits made to René, and one or more waxen figures made at La Mole's instigation. Prepared as he was, Coconnas believed that the accusation had lost much of its intensity, since it was no longer in reference to having betrayed a king, but to having made a figure of a queen, and this queen not more than from eight to ten inches high at most. He therefore replied with much vivacity, that neither he not his friend had played with a doll for many years; and he saw with much satisfaction, that his replies more than once made the judges laugh. His interrogatory concluded, he went up to his chamber singing so merrily, that La Mole, for whom he made all this noise, drew from it the brightest auguries.

La Mole was brought down from his tower, as Coconnas had been, and saw with equal astonishment the fresh turn which the investigation took. He was questioned as to his visits to René. He replied that he had only once visited the Florentine. Then, if he had not ordered a waxen figure. He replied, that René had showed him such a figure ready-made. Then he was asked if this figure did not represent a man. He replied, that it represented a woman. Then, if the purpose of the charm was not to cause the death of this man. He replied that the purpose of the charm was to cause himself to be beloved by the woman.

These questions, put in a hundred different ways, were always replied to by La Mole in the same manner. The judges looked at each other with a kind of indecision, not knowing very well what to say or do, when a note brought to the attorney-general solved the difficulty. It was thus couched: "If the accused denies, put him to the torture.—C."

The attorney put the note in his pocket, smiled at La Mole, and politely dismissed him. La Mole returned to his dungeon almost as assured, if not as joyous, as Coconnas.

"I think all will now go well," he said.

An hour afterwards, he heard footsteps, and saw a note which was slipped under his door, without seeing the hand that did it. He took it up with a trembling hand, and almos died with joy as he recognized the writting.

"Courage!" said the billet. "I am watching over you."

"Ah! if she is watching," cried La Mole, kissing the billet which had touched a hand so dear, "if she is watching, I am saved!"

It is necessary, in order that La Mole should comprehend the purport of the note, and rely, with Coconnas, on what the Piedmontese called his "invisible bucklers," that we should conduct the reader to that small house, to that small chamber, where so many tender recollections, so many bitter feelings, were agonizing the heart of a female, lying back on a divan covered with velvet cushions.

"To be a queen—powerful, young, rich, beautiful—and suffer what I suffer!" exclaimed she; "oh, it is horrible!"

Then, in her agitation, she rose, paced up and down, suddenly paused, pressed her burning forehead against the ice-cold marble, rose, pale and her face covered with tears, wrung her hands in agony, and fell back, fainting, into the nearest chair.

Suddenly the tapestry which separated the apartment in the Rue Cloche-Percée from the apartment in the Rue Tizon was lifted up, and the Duchess de Nevers appeared.

"Ah!" exclaimed Marguerite, "is it you? With what impatience I have awaited you. Well, what news?"

"Bad news—bad news, my dear friend! Catherine herself is hurrying on the trial, and is at this moment at Vincennes."

"And René?"

"Is arrested."

"And our dear prisoners?"

"The jailer informs me that they see each other daily. The day before yesterday they were searched, and La Mole broke your miniature to atoms rather than let them have it."

"Dear La Mole!"

"Annibal laughed in the teeth of the inquisitors."

"Worthy Annibal! And what more?"

"They were this morning interrogated as to the flight of the king, his projects of rebellion in Navarre; and they said not one word."

"Oh, I knew they would keep silence; but silence will kill them just as much as if they spake."

"Yes, but we must save them."

"You have thought over our plan, then?"

"I have occupied myself with it since yesterday."

"Well?"

"I have come to terms with Beaulieu. Ah, my dear queen, what a hard and greedy man! It will cost a man's life and three hundred thousand crowns."

"Only the life of a man and three hundred thousand crowns! Why, it is nothing!"

"Nothing? Why, it will cost us all our jewels at least."

"Oh, that's nothing! The King of Navarre will pay something, the Duke d'Alençon pay something, my brother Charles must pay something, or if not——"

"Oh, do not trouble yourself; I have the money, or at least three diamonds that will produce it, and the man."

"The man!—what man?"

"The man who must be killed, to be sure. Have you already forgotten that there is a man to be killed?"

"And you have found the man you wanted?"

"Precisely so."

"At the same price?" asked Marguerite, with a smile.

"At that price I could have found ten," replied Henriette; "no, no, for five hundred crowns."

"Really!"

"Now listen; this is the plot. The chapel is the only place in the fortress where women not being prisoners are admitted. We shall hide behind the altar; under the cloth will be laid two daggers. The door of the sacristy will be previously opened. Coconnas will strike the jailer, who will fall down as if dead; we shall then appear, and each cast a cloak over the shoulders of our friend. We shall then fly with them by the small door of the sacristy, and, as we shall have the password, we shall get out without difficulty."

"And once out?"

"Two horses will be in waiting at the door: they will jump on them, leave France, and reach Lorraine, whence they will occasionally return incognito."

"Oh, you restore me to life," said Marguerite. "Thus, then, we shall save them."

"I feel almost confident."

"And soon?"

"In three or four days; Beaulieu is to let us know."

"But if you were recognized in the environs of Vincennes, all our plans might be marred."

"How could any one recognize me? I go as a nun, with a large hood over my face; and no one would ever recognize the end of my nose."

"We cannot take too many precautions."

"I know that well enough, *Mordi!* as my poor dear Annibal says."

"Have you any news of the King of Navarre?"

"Yes, he was never happier, it appears—laughs, sings, and eats, drinks, and sleeps well; all he asks is to be well guarded."

"He is right."

"Adieu, Marguerite! I am going to take the field again."

"Are you sure of Beaulieu?"

"I think so."

"Of the jailer?"

"He has promised."

"Horses?"

"The best in the Duke de Nevers' stables."

"Henriette, I adore you!" And Marguerite threw her arms around her friend's neck; after which the two women separated, promising to see each other again next day and every day, at the same place and hour. They were the two charming and devoted creatures whom Coconnas, with so much reason, called the "invisible bucklers."

CHAPTER LVII.

THE TRIAL.

"Well, my brave friend," said Coconnas to La Mole, when left together at the close of their examination, "everything seems going on as favorably as we could desire it, and we shall ere long be at liberty."

"No doubt," answered La Mole; "and then the complaisance with which our jailers treat us abundantly proves that our noble friends are at work for us."

"To be sure they are," rejoined Coconnas; "and how could a queen or a princess better employ their riches than in procuring our freedom? Now let us go over our lesson a little. We are to be conducted to the chapel, where we shall be left in charge of our turnkey; we each of us find a dagger concealed for our use in a spot described to us. Well, then I manage to inflict a severe-looking, but in reality innocent wound, on our guard, to make it appear we, being two, overpowered him. The next thing, we barricade the door of the chapel by piling up the benches against it, while our two princesses emerge from their hiding-places behind the altar, and Henriette opens the small side-door!"

"And, then," exclaimed La Mole, in accents of delight, "we rush forth, and exchange our gloomy prison for the fine fresh air. A couple of vigorous horses are in waiting for us; a hasty embrace with our fair preservers, and away we go to Lorraine. True, I could have wished to be banished to Navarre, for that is her home; but as things are, we must be content at Nancy, which is but fifty leagues from Paris."

"But what ails you, my friend?"

"Nothing—merely an idea that came across me."

"I should think not a very agreeable one, by your becoming so pale."

"I was wondering within myself why we were taken to the chapel at all."

"Why," said Coconnas, "to pray, of course—what else?"

"But," answered La Mole, "it is only customary for those who have undergone the torture or are condemned to death to pass the night in the chapel."

"Truly," replied Coconnas, becoming pale in his turn, "this deserves our attention; let us speak to the worthy fellow I am to carve my name upon with my dagger.—Here, I say, turnkey!"

"Did you call?" said the man, who had been keeping watch at the top of the stairs.

"We want to know whether it is not arranged for us to escape from the chapel?"

"Hush!" said the turnkey, looking round him with terror.

"Don't be frightened—no one can hear you; speak out."

"Yes, you will be conducted to the chapel, according to the custom that all persons condemned to death shall pass the night previous to their execution in prayer."

Coconnas and La Mole exchanged looks of surprise and alarm.

"You expect, then, that we shall be condemned to death?"

"Why, you think so yourselves, don't you? else why take the trouble to make arrangements for your flight?"

"There is reason in what he says," said Coconnas.

"We are playing a critical game, it seems," replied La Mole.

"And do I risk nothing?" said the jailer. "Suppose, in the excitement of the moment, you were to wound me in the wrong place, strike your dagger an inch or two deeper than you intended!"

"*Mordi!*" exclaimed Coconnas, "I only wish we could change places, and I had nothing more to fear than you have. But hark! I fancy some one is approaching."

"Oh, pray, pray gentlemen, get into your cells—make haste!"

"And when will our trial take place?"

"To-morrow at latest, but don't be uneasy; the friends who are interested for you shall be duly informed."

"Then let us bid adieu to each other for the present, and to these detested walls forever!"

The friends exchanged an affectionate embrace, and each retired to his place of confinement—La Mole sighing, Coconnas humming an air. Nothing unusual occurred until seven o'clock in the evening. Night descended, dark and rainy, on the donjon of Vincennes; just such weather as would have favored an escape. Coconnas' supper was brought, and eaten with his ordinary appetite; and he had well-nigh composed himself to sleep, while listening to the loud murmurs of the wind, and the splashing rain as it drove heavily against the walls, when he was roused by a sound of persons passing to and fro from the chamber of La Mole.

In vain did Coconnas strain his listening powers—he could distinguish nothing. The time passed on—no person came near him. "Strange," murmured he, "that La Mole should receive so many visits, while I seem quite forgotten! perhaps La Mole felt himself suddenly taken ill, and called out for assistance. What can it mean?"

An hour and a half was thus consumed in vainly watching for some clearance to this mystery, and Coconnas was beginning to feel both angry and sleepy, when the sudden turning of the lock made him spring to his feet.

"All's right," said he, mentally; "they are coming, no doubt, to conduct us to the chapel, without any previous condemnation. *Mordi!* the night is most favorable—dark as a pit; I only hope the horses they give us will be able to find their way."

He was about to ask some jocular question of the turnkey, who had by that time entered, when he observed the man put his finger to his lips, and roll his great eyes in a most significant manner.

Coconnas then perceived a dim outline of persons following the jailer, and quickly distinguished two figures wearing helmets, on which the candle, smoking and flickering in the strong current of air rushing up the staircase, cast a reflection.

"Hallo, hallo!" exclaimed he; "what is the meaning of all this?—where are we going to?"

The jailer replied only with a sigh, which resembled a groan.

"Follow the halberdiers, sir," said a voice, which at once made Coconnas aware that the soldiers were accompanied by an officer of some kind.

"And where is M. de la Mole?" inquired the Piedmontese; "what has become of him?"

"Follow the halberdiers!" repeated the same voice that had previously issued the same command.

Further remonstrance was unavailing; without another word, therefore, Coconnas began to descend the spiral staircase. At the first floor the guards stopped; the door was opened, and a number of persons arrayed as judges and seated in judicial order presented themselves, while in the background Coconnas discerned the dim outline of a man with naked arms and a look that made a cold dew start to his forehead.

Still concealing his alarm, he entered the chamber with an easy, *degagée* air, his head thrown a little on one side, and his hand on his hip, after the most approved manner of court gallants. As Coconnas advanced, he perceived La Mole sitting on a bench near the judges and officials. The guards led Coconnas to the front of the tribunal:

arrived there, he stopped, turned round, and smilingly nodded to La Mole ; then remained in close attention to the proceedings of the court.

"What is your name ?" inquired the president.

"Marc Annibal de Coconnas," replied the Piedmontese, with gentlemanly grace, "Count of Montpantier, Chenaux, and other places ; but I presume you don't wish to know all that."

"Where were you born ?"

"At Saint Colomban, near Suza."

"How old are you ?"

"Twenty-seven years and three months."

"Good !" answered the president.

"He seems to be pleased with my account of myself," murmured Coconnas.

"Now, then," continued the president, "what was your motive in quitting the service of the Duke d'Alençon ?"

"To rejoin my friend, M. de la Mole, who, when I quitted M. d'Alençon, had also left him some days."

"And what were you doing when arrested, the day of the chase at Saint-Germains ?"

"Why, hunting, of course !" replied Coconnas.

"The king was also present at that chase, and there he was first seized with violent illness."

"I know nothing about that ; I was not near the king myself, and I did not even know he had been taken ill."

The judges regarded each other with an air of incredulity.

"Oh ! you were ignorant of his majesty's illness, were you ?"

"Yes, completely so, and I regret to hear of it ; for though the King of France is not my king, I still pity him, and feel for him very much."

"Really ?"

"On my honor I do. I don't say as much for his brother, the Duke d'Alençon, for there, I must confess——"

"We have nothing to do with the Duke d'Alençon ; our business is with his majesty——"

"Whose very humble servant I have already told you I am," answered Coconnas.

"Then, being his servant, as you say, be pleased to tell us what you know relative to a certain wax figure."

"Oh! what, we are going over that story again, are we?

"If you have no objection."

"*Pardi!* I on the contrary, I prefer it —go on."

"How came this statue to be found in M. de la Mole's possession?"

"M. de la Mole's! No, no, you mean in René's possession."

"Then you acknowledge the existence of such an image?"

"I don't know whether it exists or not—I could tell you better if I saw it."

"Here it is. Is it the one you have previously seen?"

"It is."

"Write down," said the judge, "that the accused recognizes the statue as the one he has heretofore seen in the possession of M. de la Mole."

"No, no, no!" interposed Coconnas, "do not let us mistake one another; write that I say it is the same figure I saw at René's."

"Well, be it so—at René's, and on what day?"

"The only day La Mole and myself ever were at René's.

"You admit, then, having been there with M. de la Mole?"

"Why, I never denied it, did I?"

"Write down that the accused admits having gone to René's to work certain charms and conjurations——"

"Stop, if you please, M. le President, and moderate your enthusiasm a little—I said no such thing."

"You deny having gone to René's house, for the sake of charms and magical purposes?"

"I do; the conjuration that took place was by chance, and wholly unpremeditated."

"But still it took place?"

"Certainly; I cannot deny that something resembling the working of a charm did occur."

"Write down that the accused admits having gone to René's for the sake of obtaining a charm against the king's life."

"The king's life!" exclaimed Coconnas; "'tis a base lie; no such charm was ever made or sought for."

"There, gentlemen!" said La Mole, "you hear!"

"Silence!" vociferated the president; then, turning towards the clerk, he said, "Against the king's life. Have you written it?"

"No, no!" cried Coconnas, "I said no such thing, and then the figure is not that of a man, but of a woman."

"What did I tell you, gentlemen?" inquired La Mole.

"M. de la Mole," said the president, "reply when you are questioned, but do not interrupt the interrogatory of others."

"You say that the figure is that of a female?" resumed the judge.

"Of course I do."

"Why, then, does it wear a royal crown and mantle?"

"*Pardieu!* for a very simple reason—because the figure was meant for——"

Here La Mole rose, and placed a finger on his lips.

"True!" said Coconnas, "I was beginning to relate matters with which these gentlemen have nothing at all to do."

"You persist, then, in your assertion, that this waxen image was intended to represent a woman?"

"Certainly, I do persist in stating the truth."

"And you refuse to say who the woman was?"

"A female in my own country," said La Mole, "whom I loved, and by whom I was desirous of being beloved."

"You are not the person interrogated, M. de la Mole," exclaimed the president; "either be silent, or I shall be obliged to have you gagged."

"Gag a gentleman, and my friend, merely for speaking—can it be possible that I hear aright?—for shame! for shame!"

"Bring in René!" said the attorney-general.

"Yes, yes, by all means, fetch René," said Coconnas, "fetch him, pray; we shall soon see who is right then."

René entered, pale, shrunken, and so altered, that the two young men seemed scarce to recognize him. The wretched old man appeared more conscience-stricken and bowed down by the weight of the crime he was about to commit, than by those he had already perpetrated.

"Maître René!" said the judge, "do you know the two accused persons here present?"

"I do," answered René, in a voice which betrayed his emotion.

"As having seen them where?"

"In various places, but more especially at my own house."

"How frequently at your house?"

"Only once."

As René proceeded, the countenance of Coconnas grew brighter; La Mole, on the contrary, as though warned by some presentiment of evil, looked graver than before.

"And on what occasion did they pay you a visit?"

René seemed to hesitate a moment, then said:

"To order me to make a small waxen figure."

"Maître René," interrupted Coconnas, "permit me to tell you, you are making a little mistake."

"Silence, I command!" cried the president; then, turning towards René, he said, "and pray was this figure to represent a man or woman?"

"A man!" answered René.

Coconnas sprung up as though he had received an electric shock. "A man, do you say?" asked he.

"A man!" responded René, but in so feeble a voice that the president could scarcely hear him.

"And why was this statue clad in a royal mantle, with a crown on its head?"

"Because," replied René, "it represented a king."

"Infamous liar!" cried Coconnas," perfectly infuriated.

"Hold your peace, Coconnas," interposed La Mole, "every man has a right to sell his soul his own way; let the wretched being say what he chooses."

"Aye, but he has no right to destroy the bodies of others while he barters his own soul!" answered Coconnas.

"And what is the signification of the needle found sticking in the heart of the image, with a small banner bearing the letter *m* at the end?"

"The needle is emblematical of the sword or dagger, and the letter *m* stands for *mort.*"

Coconnas sprung forward as though to strangle René, but was held back by the guards.

"That will do!" said the officer; "the tribunal is in possession of all it desires to know. Let the prisoners be re-conducted to the waiting-room."

"But," exclaimed Coconnas, "it is quite impossible to hear one's self accused of such crimes without protesting against them."

"Protest as much as you like, gentlemen, no person hinders you.—Guards, take the prisoners away."

The officials seized upon La Mole and Coconnas, and led them away, each by a separate door. The attorney-general then signed to the man with bare arms, whom Coconnas had observed on entering, and said:

"Do not go away, my good fellow, there will be work for you ere the night is over."

"Which shall I begin with?" said the man, respectfully raising his cap.

"With that one!" answered the president, pointing to La Mole, whose shadow could just be discerned between his two guards; then, approaching René, who stood in trembling expection of being ordered back to his place of confinement in the Châtelet: "You have well spoken, my friend; be under no alarm, both the king and the queen shall be made acquainted that it is to you they will be indebted for coming at the real truth of this affair."

But this promise, instead of inspiring René with fresh hope, seemed but to augment his alarm, and he replied only by a deep sigh, almost resembling the groan of one in pain.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE TORTURE OF THE BOOT.

It was only when again conducted to his chamber, and the door secured on him, that Coconnas, no longer sustained by the altercation with the judges, fell into a train of reflections.

"It seems to me," thought he, "matters are going against us. They really wish to cut off our heads. I think it is time to go to the chapel."

These words, pronounced in a low tone, were cut short by a cry so shrill, so piercing, that it seemed impossible it could proceed from a human being, for it penetrated through the thick wall, and vibrated against the iron bars.

Coconnas shuddered with terror, although he was so brave that his courage was nearly allied to that of wild beasts. He stood motionless, doubting whether what he had heard was not the wind, when he heard it again; and this time he was convinced not only that the voice was human, but that it was the voice of La Mole. At this voice, the Piedmontese forgot he was himself a prisoner confined by two doors, three gates, and a wall twelve feet thick; he rushed forward, crying, "They are murdering some one here!"

But he encountered the wall so violently, that the shock threw him back on a stone bench.

"Oh, they have killed him!" repeated he; "it is abominable, and without arms."

He looked about on every side for a weapon.

At this moment the door opened, and the same voice that had been before so disagreeable to him, said:

"Come, sir, the court attends you."

"Good!" said Coconnas; "to hear my sentence, I suppose."

"Yes, sir."

"I breathe again—go on, sir." And he followed the officer, who marched in front, his black wand in his hand.

Spite of his expressed satisfaction, Coconnas glanced anxiously on either side. "Oh," murmured he, "I do not see my worthy jailer; I wish he was here."

On entering the chamber, Coconnas perceived the attorney-general, who had conducted the prosecution with most palpable animosity, for Catherine had charged him to carry on the affair earnestly. A curtain was drawn back, and exposed the recesses of this chamber; so terrible were these recesses, thus lighted up, that Coconnas felt his knees tremble, and he exclaimed, "Oh, *mon Dieu!*"

The sight before him was indeed alarming. The portion of the apartment which had been concealed during the examination by a curtain, now raised, seemed like the vestibule of hell. "Oh!" said Coconnas, "the chamber of torture is prepared, and only awaits the victim. What does this mean?"

"Kneel down, M. Annibal de Coconnas," thundered a voice; "kneel down, and hear your sentence."

And before he had time even to collect his thoughts, two strong hands laid hold of him, and forced him to his knees.

The voice continued: "Sentence of the court sitting at Vincennes on Marc Annibal de Coconnas, accused and convicted of the crime of high treason, of an attempt to poison, of sacrilege and magic against the person of the king, of a conspiracy against the state, and of having driven a prince of the blood into rebellion by his pernicious counsels."

At each fresh charge, Coconnas kept shaking his head very determinately.

The judge continued: "In consequence of which, the aforesaid Marc Annibal de Coconnas will be taken from prison to the Place St.-Jean-en-Grève, to be there decapitated, his property confiscated, his woods cut down, his châteaux destroyed; and a post, with a copper-plate bearing an inscription recording his crime and punishment, planted there."

"As for my head," said Coconnas, "that I know is in jeopardy; but as for my woods and châteaux, I do not fear for them in the least, and I defy all your hatchets and pickaxes to harm them."

"Silence!" said the judge, and he continued:

"And, moreover, the aforesaid Coconnas——"

"What!" interrupted Coconnas, "will they do anything more after cutting my head off?—that is very cruel!"

"No, monsieur," replied the judge, "*before.*"

He continued: "And the aforesaid Coconnas will undergo, before the execution of this sentence, the extraordinary question, consisting of ten wedges."

Coconnas sprang to his feet, fixing his eyes with a withering expression on his judges. "For what?" cried he.

This torture was, in reality, ruin to Coconnas' hopes. He would not be taken to the chapel until after the torture, and the torture often occasioned death; fo it was held to be a proof of cowardice to confess, and the torture was therefore the more severe in proportion to the patient's obstinacy.

The judge made no reply, but continued, "In order to compel the aforesaid Coconnas to avow who were his accomplices."

"*Mordi!*" cried Coconnas, "this is infamous—this is cowardice!"

The judge, accustomed to the indignant protestations of the victims, made a sign. Coconnas, seized by the legs and arms, was overpowered and bound to the rack, before he could even see who were the authors of this violence.

"Wretches!" shouted Coconnas, straining the cords that bound him so violently, that his tormentors retreated in alarm. "Cowards! do your worst; I defy you to extract one word from me. It is not the torture that can make one of my race speak."

"Greffier, prepare to write," said the judge.

"Yes, prepare to write," cried Coconnas; "and if you write all I tell you, you scoundrel, you will have something to do."

"Will you confess?" asked the judge.

"Never!"

"You had better reflect whilst it is yet time. Executioner, make ready."

At these words, a man holding a cord in his hand advanced towards him. It was Maître Caboche. Caboche, without moving a muscle of his face, or affecting to recognize Coconnas, placed two planks between his legs, then two more outside, and bound them together with a cord.

This formed what was called the "boot."

In the "ordinary" question, six wedges were used, which crushed the flesh: in the "extraordinary" question ten were employed, which not only crushed the flesh, but broke the bones also.

Maître Caboche introduced the wedge between the planks, and then, with his mallet in his hand, looked at the judge.

"Will you confess?" asked the latter.

"Never!" returned Coconnas, although he felt a cold damp all over his brow.

"Proceed," said the judge.

Caboche raised his heavy mallet, and struck a tremendous blow on the wedge. Coconnas did not utter the slightest sound at this first wedge, which usually extorted a groan from the most resolute. On the contrary, his countenance expressed the greatest wonder, and he gazed in astonishment at Caboche, who, his arm raised, stood ready to repeat the blow.

"What was your intention in concealing yourself in the forest?" demanded the judge.

"To enjoy the fresh air."

"Proceed," said the judge.

Caboche struck again. Coconnas did not stir, but kept his eyes fixed on the executioner with the same expression of surprise. The judge frowned.

"He is indeed determined!" muttered he; "has the wedge entered, maître?"

Caboche stooped, as if to examine it, and whispered

Coconnas, "Cry out! cry out!" Then rising, "Up to the head, sir," said he to the judge.

"Second wedge!" was the reply.

The words of Caboche explained all to Coconnas; the worthy executioner was rendering him the greatest service in his power: he was sparing him not only pain, but, moreover, the shame of a confession, by driving, in place of oak wedges, wedges of leather, with the top only of wood; and further, he thus left him all his strength to mount the scaffold manfully.

"Oh, excellent Caboche!" muttered Coconnas, "fear nothing; I will cry out loud enough."

Caboche had introduced a second wedge, larger than the first, and, at a sign from the judge, struck as if he were going to demolish the donjon of Vincennes at a blow.

"Ah! ah!—hou! hou!" roared Coconnas, "you are breaking my bones!"

"Ah," said the judge, "the second seems to take effect. What were you doing in the forest?"

"I have already told you."

"Proceed."

"Confess," whispered Caboche.

"What?"

"Anything—only confess."

And he dealt another blow on the wedge.

"Oh, oh!" cried Coconnas, "you wish to know by whose order I was in the forest?"

"Yes."

"By the order of M. d'Alençon."

"Write that," said the judge.

"If I laid a snare for the King of Navarre," continued Coconnas, "I only obeyed my master's orders."

"Ah, you denounced me, tallow-face!" thought Coconnas; "I will be even with you."

And he related all the visits of François to the King of Navarre, the interviews between De Mouy and D'Alençon, and the history of the red mantle. He gave precise, terrible, incontestable evidence against D'Alençon, making it seem all the while as though his statements were only extorted from him by the pain, he yelled, screamed, and foamed so naturally; and the judge at last became terrified himself at having to record details that so fearfully compromised a prince of the blood.

"Ah," said Caboche, "this gentleman gives the greffier enough to do. What would he have said, if the wedges had been of wood?"

The judge retired, excusing Coconnas the other wedges in consequence of his confession, and Caboche was left alone with Coconnas.

"Well," said he, "how do you find yourself, sir?"

"Ah, excellent Caboche, I will never forget what you have done for me!"

"You are right; for if they knew what I have done for you, I should soon take your place, and they would not amuse me with leathern wedges."

"But how came you to think——"

"I will tell you," said Caboche, twisting, for the sake of appearances, bandages of bloody linen about Coconnas' legs; "I knew you were arrested, that Queen Catherine wished to kill you, and I guessed you would be put to the question, and I took my measures accordingly."

"At the risk of what might happen to yourself?"

"Sir," replied Caboche, "you are the only gentleman who has ever given me his hand, and I wished to prove to you that, executioner as I am, I have a heart: you shall see how I will perform my office to-morrow."

"To-morrow?"

"Yes."

"What office?"

Caboche stared.

"Have you forgotten the sentence?"

"Ah, true, I had forgotten all about that."

He had not forgotten it, but he was thinking of the chapel, the knife concealed beneath the napkin, of Henriette and the queen, of the door of the sacristry, the two horses that awaited them; of liberty, of the fresh air, and happiness and security beyond the bounds of France.

"Now," said Caboche, "I must get you from the rack to the litter. Do not forget both your legs are broken, and that the least movement pains you."

"Ah! oh!" cried Coconnas, as the two assistants advanced.

"Take courage," said Caboche; "if you cry so now, what will you do presently?"

"Maître Caboche," replied Coconnas, "I pray you lift me yourself, as I do not wish your two estimable acolytes to touch me."

"Place the litter near the rack," said Caboche.

The two assistants obeyed.

Caboche then raised Coconnas in his arms as if he had been an infant, and placed him on the litter.

The jailer then appeared with a lantern.

"To the chapel," said he.

The bearers and Coconnas started, after Coconnas had again given his hand to Caboche.

The former grasp had been too useful to him not to induce him to repeat it.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE CHAPEL.

THE mournful cortege crossed, in perfect silence, the two drawbridges of the fortress and the courtyard which leads to the chapel, through the windows of which a pale light colored the figures of the men in red robes.

Coconnas eagerly breathed the night air, although it was heavy with rain. He looked at the darkness, and rejoiced to see that everything conspired to favor the flight of himself and his companion. On entering the chapel he saw in the choir, and at three paces from the altar, a mass of something wrapped in a large white mantle. It was La Mole.

"Since we are once more reunited," said Coconnas, in a voice of affected languor, "carry me to my friend."

La Mole was gloomy and pale; his head reclined against the marble wall, and his black hair, bathed with profuse perspiration, which gave to his countenance the paleness of ivory, seemed to have preserved the form it had assumed after having been stiffened on his head with the pain.

On a signal from the turnkey, the two valets went to seek the priest whom Coconnas had asked for.

This was the signal agreed upon.

Coconnas followed them with his eyes with anxiety; but his was not the only ardent look fixed on them. Scarcely had they disappeared than two women rushed from behind the altar, and hastened rapidly towards the choir.

Marguerite hurried towards La Mole and seized him in her arms. La Mole uttered a piercing shriek—one of those cries which Coconnas had heard in his dungeon.

"*Mon Dieu!* what ails thee, dear La Mole?" inquired Marguerite. "Oh, Heaven! you are all blood!"

Coconnas, who had also rushed towards the altar, taken up the dagger, and had his arm round Henriette's waist, turned suddenly.

"Get up," said Marguerite; "get up, I entreat you! You see the moment has arrived."

A terrible smile of grief passed over La Mole's pale lips, which seemed as though they would never smile again.

"Beloved queen!" said the young man, "you have calculated without Catherine, and consequently without a crime. I have been put to the torture; my bones are broken, all my body is one wound, and the effort I make at this moment to press my lips upon your forehead causes me agony worse than death."

And as he spoke, with great exertion, and ghastly pale, La Mole pressed his lips on the queen's brow.

"Torture!" cried Coconnas; "and so did I undergo it. But the executioner, then, did not do for you what he did for me?" And Coconnas told all.

"Ah!" replied La Mole, "that is easily explained. You gave him your hand on the day of our visit; I forgot that all men were brothers, and was disdainful. God punishes me for my pride. God be praised!"

La Mole clasped his hands. Coconnas and the two ladies exchanged a look of indescribable horror.

"Come, come," said the jailer, who had been to the door to listen, and had returned; "come along! Do not lose any time, my dear M. de Coconnas. Give me my blow with the dagger, and manage it like a worthy, kind gentleman, for they will soon be here."

Marguerite was kneeling beside La Mole, like one of the reclining figures on a monument.

"Come, my dear friend," said Coconnas; "courage! I am strong, and will carry you. I can place you on your horse, or hold you on my own, if you could keep yourself erect in the saddle. Come, let us go—let us go! You understand what the good fellow says: our lives are at stake."

La Mole made a superhuman, a sublime effort.

"True," he said, "*your* life is at stake," and he tried to rise.

Annibal placed his arms under him and raised him up. La Mole, during this time, had only uttered a low moaning; but at the moment when Coconnas let him go, to speak to the turnkey, and when the sufferer was no longer supported but by the arms of two women, his legs bent under him, and in spite of Marguerite's efforts, the tears gushing from her, he fell like a mass, and the piercing shriek he could no longer repress made the chapel echo through all its gloomy vaults.

"You see," said La Mole, in an agony of distress; "you see, my beloved, so leave me—leave me with one last adieu. I have not revealed one word, Marguerite. Your secret is enveloped in my love, and will die with me. Adieu, dearest, adieu!"

Marguerite, almost lifeless herself, threw her arms round that dear and beautiful head, and imprinted on his brow a kiss that was almost holy.

"You, Annibal," said La Mole; "you who have been spared these agonies, who are young and may escape, fly, fly! my dearest friend, and give me the consolation, when dying, to know that you are in safety."

"The hour is passing," exclaimed the jailer. "Come, gentlemen, make haste!"

Henriette endeavored to lead Annibal gently away; whilst Marguerite was on her knees before La Mole, her hair dishevelled, and eyes overflowing with tears.

"Fly, Annibal!" repeated La Mole; "fly, and do not afford our enemies the joyful spectacle of the death of two innocent men."

Coconnas quietly disengaged himself from Henriette, who was leading him to the door, and with a gesture so solemn that it was majestic, said:

"Madame, first give the five hundred crowns we have promised to this man."

"Here they are," said Henriette.

Then, turning towards La Mole and shaking his head sorrowfully, he said:

"As for you, La Mole, you have done me an injury, by thinking for one moment that I would quit you. Have I not sworn to live and die with you? But you are so great a sufferer, that I forgive you."

And he seated himself with a resolute air near his friend, towards whom he leaned his head, and whose forehead he touched with his lips.

Then he drew gently, gently as a mother would a child, the head of his dear friend towards him, until it glided from the wall, and reposed itself calmly on his breast.

Marguerite was gloomy: she had picked up the poniard which Coconnas had let fall.

"Oh, my beloved one!" cried La Mole, extending his hands as he comprehended her purpose, "do not forget that I die in order to destroy the slightest suspicion of our love."

"What, then, can I do for you," exclaimed Marguerite, in despair, "if I must not die with you?"

"You may," replied La Mole; "you may render my death sweet, and so that I may in a manner meet it with a smile."

Marguerite clasped her hands, and looked inquiringly at him.

"Do you remember the evening, Marguerite, when in exchange for the life I offered you then, and to-day lay down for you, you made me a secret promise?"

Marguerite started.

"Ah, you do remember!" said La Mole, "for you shudder."

"Yes, yes, I remember," said Marguerite; "and on my soul, Hyacinthe, I will keep that promise."

Marguerite extended her hand towards the altar, as if a second time to call on God to witness her oath.

La Mole's face lighted up as if the vaulted roof of the chapel had opened.

"They are coming!" exclaimed the jailer.

Marguerite uttered a cry, and hastened towards La Mole, but for fear of increasing his agony, she paused all trembling before him.

Henriette pressed her lips on Coconnas' brow, and said to him:

"Dearest Annibal, I understand you, and I am proud of you. I know the heroism that makes you die, and I love you for that heroism. Before God, I will always love you more than anything living; and what Marguerite has sworn to do for la Mole (although I know not what it is) I will also do for you."

And she held out her hand to Marguerite.

"Well said: now heaven be with you!" replied Coconnas.

"Before you leave me, dearest," said La Mole, "one last favor; give me some last souvenir, that I may kiss it as I mount the scaffold."

"Ah, yes," cried Marguerite, "here, take this!"—and she untied from her neck a small reliquary of gold, fastened to a chain of the same metal.

"Here," she said, "is a holy relic which I have worn from my childhood; my mother put it round my neck when I was very little and she still loved me. It was given by our uncle, Pope Clement, and has never quitted me. Take it!"

La Mole took it, and kissed it eagerly.

"They are opening the door," said the jailer. "Fly, ladies, fly!"

The two women hastened behind the altar, and disappeared at the moment the priest entered.

CHAPTER LX.

THE PLACE SAINT-JEAN-EN-GRÈVE.

It was seven o'clock in the morning, and the crowd was waiting, dense and riotous, in the squares, the streets, and the quays.

At six o'clock in the morning a tumbril, the same in which the two friends after their duel had been conveyed half dead to the Louvre, had quitted Vincennes, crossed the Rue Saint Antoine slowly, and on its route, the spectators, so huddled together that they crushed one another, seemed like statues, with their eyes fixed and their mouths open in wonderment.

There was this day a heart-rending spectacle offered by the queen-mother to all the people of Paris.

In the tumbril we have mentioned as making its slow way from Vincennes, were lying on some straw two young men, bareheaded and entirely clothed in black, leaning against each other. Coconnas supported on his knees La Mole, whose head hung over the sides of the tumbril, and whose eyes wandered vaguely around him.

The crowd, eager to stare with greedy gaze, even to the bottom of the vehicle, pressed, drove, heaved, lifted itself upon stones, clung to angles of the walls, and appeared satisfied when it contrived to gain a look at the two bodies which were going from suffering to destruction.

It was rumored that La Mole would die without having confessed one of the charges imputed to him; whilst, on the contrary, Coconnas, it was asserted, could not endure the torture, and had disclosed everything.

So there were cries on all sides:

"Look at the red-haired one! It was he who confessed! It was he who owned everything! He is the coward who caused the death of the other, who is a brave fellow, and would not confess anything!"

The two young men perfectly understood this; the one the praises, and the other the reproaches, which accompanied their funeral march; and whilst La Mole pressed the hands of his friend, a sublime expression of disdain overspread the features of the Piedmontese, who from the foul tumbril gazed on the stupid mob as if he were looking down from a triumphal car.

Misfortune had done its heavenly work; had ennobled the countenance of Coconnas, as death was about to render divine his soul.

"Are we nearly there?" asked La Mole; "for I can endure this no longer, my dear friend, and I feel as if I should faint."

"Rouse thee—rouse thee, La Mole! We are passing by the Rue Tizon and the Rue Cloche-Percée. Look, look!"

"Oh, raise me—raise me, that I may once again behold that blissful abode!"

Coconnas touched the executioner on the shoulder, as he sat on the tumbril and drove the horse.

"Maître," he said, "do us the kindness to pause a moment in front of the Rue Tizon."

Caboche bowed his head in token of assent, and stopped.

La Mole raised himself with a vast effort, aided by Coconnas, and gazed, with tearful eyes, at the small house, now closed and silent as the tomb: a groan burst from his overcharged breast, and he said, in a low voice:

"Adieu, adieu—youth, love, life!"

And his head fell on his breast.

"Courage," said Coconnas; "we may, perchance find all this above!"

"Do you think so?" murmured La Mole.

"I think so, because the priest told me so, and more especially because I hope so. But do not faint, my dear friend, or these wretches will laugh at us."

Caboche heard these last words, and, whipping his horse with one hand, he extended the other—unseen by any one—to Coconnas. It contained a small sponge saturated with a powerful stimulant, which after having smelt and rubbed over his brow, La Mole felt himself revived and reanimated, and he kissed the reliquary suspended from his neck.

When they reached the quay they saw the scaffold, which was elevated considerably above the ground.

"My friend," said La Mole, "I would fain die first."

Coconnas again touched the headsman's shoulder.

"Maître," said Coconnas, "my friend has suffered more than I have, and he says he should suffer all the more to see me die first; and if I were to die before him, he would have no one to support him on the scaffold."

"Good, good!" said Caboche, wiping away a tear with the back of his hand; "be easy, it shall be as you desire."

"And with one blow, eh?" said the Piedmontese, in a low tone.

"Yes, with one blow!"

"'Tis well!"

The tumbril stopped. They had arrived. Coconnas put on his hat.

A murmur like that of the waves of the sea reached the ears of La Mole. He tried to rise, but his strength failed him, and Caboche and Coconnas were compelled to support him under his arms.

The place was paved with heads, and the steps of the Hôtel de Ville seemed an amphitheater peopled with spectators; each window was filled with animated countenances.

When they saw the handsome young man who could no longer support himself on his legs, bruised and broken, make an effort to reach the scaffold, a vast sound was heard, like a cry of universal desolation; the men groaned, and the women uttered plaintive sighs.

"He was one of the grandest dons at the court," said one.

"How handsome he is! How pale he looks!" said the women. "He is the one who would not confess!"

"My dearest friend," said La Mole, "I cannot support myself. Carry me!"

"Stay a moment," replied Coconnas.

He made a sign to the executioner, who moved aside; then, stooping, he lifted La Mole in his arms as if he had been an infant, and went up the steps to the scaffold with unfaltering foot, bore his burden firmly on to the platform, and put him down amidst the shoutings and applause of the vast multitude.

Coconnas returned the greeting by raising his hat from his head, and then threw it down on the scaffold beside him.

"Look round," said La Mole; "do you see *them* anywhere?"

Coconnas glanced deliberately around him and, when his eyes reached a certain spot, paused. Then, without removing his look, he touched his friend on the shoulder, saying:

"Look, look, at the window of that little tower!"

With his other hand he pointed out to La Mole the small building which still exists at the corner of the Rue de la Vannerie and the Rue Monton—a remnant of past ages. Two females, clothed in black, were leaning on each other, somewhat retired from the window.

"Ah!" said La Mole, "I had but one fear, and that was to die without again seeing her. I have beheld her again, and now I can die."

And, with his eyes steadfastly fixed on the small window, he lifted the reliquary to his lips, and covered it with kisses.

Coconnas saluted the two women with as much grace as if he were in a drawing-room, and they replied to the two devoted men by shaking their handkerchiefs bathed in tears.

Caboche then touched Coconnas on his shoulder, and looking at him very significantly, the Piedmontese replied:

"Yes, yes."

Then, turning to La Mole, he said to him:

"One last embrace, dear friend, and die like a man! That, beloved La Mole, will be no hardship for you, who are so brave."

"Ah," replied La Mole, "there will be no merit in me to die well, suffering the torments I do."

The priest approached, and extended the crucifix to La Mole, who smiled, and pointed to the reliquary he held in his hand.

"No matter," replied the priest, "still pray for strength from Him who suffered what you are about to suffer."

La Mole kissed the feet of the crucifix.

"I am ready," said La Mole.

"Can you hold your head upright?" asked Caboche, coming with his drawn sword behind La Mole, who was now on his knees.

"I hope so," was the reply.

"Then all will go well."

"But you," said La Mole, "will not forget what I requested of you; this reliquary will open the doors for you."

"Make yourself quite easy; and now try and hold your head perfectly straight."

La Mole held his neck erect, and looking towards the little tower, said:

"Adieu, Marguerite! bless——"

He could not finish; with one stroke of his keen and flashing sword, Caboche severed from the body the head of La Mole, which rolled to Coconnas' feet.

The body fell gently back, as if going to rest.

"Thanks, good friend, thanks," said Coconnas, extending his hand for the third time to the executioner.

One cry arose from the lips of a thousand human beings; and amongst them, Coconnas fancied he heard a shriek more piercing than all the rest.

"My son," said the priest to Coconnas, "have you nothing you would confess to God?"

"*Ma foi!* no father," replied the Piedmontese, "all I had to say, I said yesterday to you."

Then, turning to Caboche, he said:

"Now then, headsman, my last friend, one more service!"

Before he knelt, he turned on the multitude a look so calm, so full of resignation, that a murmur of admiration came to soothe his ear and flatter his pride. Then, taking in his hands the head of his dear friend, and impressing a last kiss on the purple lips, he gave one more look towards the little tower, and kneeling down, still holding the beloved head in his hands, he cried: "Now!"

He had scarcely uttered the word than Caboche, with a sweep of his arm, had cut his head from his body.

"It is time it was all over," said the worthy creature, trembling all over, "poor, poor fellow!"

He took with some difficulty from the clenched fingers of La Mole the reliquary of gold, and threw his cloak over the sad remains, which the tumbril had yet to convey to his sinister abode.

The spectacle was over: the crowd dispersed.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE HEADSMAN'S TOWER.

NIGHT spread her mantle over the city, still shuddering under the recollection of this spectacle, the details of which passed from mouth to mouth and made sorrowful each family repast.

In contrast to the city, which was silent and mournful, the Louvre was joyous, noisy, and illuminated. There was a grand fête at the palace—a fête commanded by Charles IX.; a fête, which he had ordered for that evening at the same time he had ordered the execution for the morning.

The Queen of Navarre had received on the previous evening the king's orders to be present, and in the hope that La Mole and Coconnas would escape in the night, in consequence of all measures being taken for their safety, she had promised her brother to comply with his desire.

But when she had lost all hope, after the terrible scene in the chapel—after she had, from a last impulse of that deep love which was the most decided and enduring of her life, been present at the execution, she had firmly resolved that neither prayers nor threats should compel her to go to a boisterous festival at the Louvre the same day on which she had witnessed so terrible a scene at the Grève.

The king had on this day exhibited another proof of that power of will, which no one, perhaps, ever displayed more energetically than Charles IX.

In bed for a fortnight, weak as a dying man, ghastly as a corpse, he yet arose at five o'clock, and was attired in his gayest habiliments, although during his toilette he had fainted three times.

About eight o'clock he inquired after his sister, if any one had seen her, and if they knew where she was. No one could answer satisfactorily, for the queen had gone to her apartments about eleven o'clock, and refused admittance to everybody.

But there was no refusal for Charles. Leaning on the arm of M. de Nancey, he proceeded to the Queen of Navarre's apartments and entered suddenly by the secret door.

Although he expected a melancholy sight, and had prepared for it, that which he beheld was even more distressing than he had anticipated.

Marguerite, half dead, was lying on a sofa, her head buried in the cushions, neither weeping nor praying ; ever since her return she had been groaning in bitterest anguish.

At the other corner of the chamber, Henriette de Nevers, that daring bold woman, lay stretched on the carpet, without consciousness.

Charles desired Nancey to await him in the corridor, and entered, pale and trembling.

Neither of the women saw him : Gillonne, alone, who was at the moment endeavoring to revive Henriette, rose on her knee and looked terrified at the king, who made a sign with his hand, whereupon she rose, curtseyed reverentially, and retired.

Charles then approached Marguerite, looked at her for a moment in silence, and then in a tone of which his harsh voice might have been thought incapable, said:

"Margot, my sister!"

The queen started, and turned round.

"Your majesty?" she said.

"Come, come, sister dear, rouse yourself."

Marguerite raised her eyes to heaven.

"Yes," said Charles; "I know all—but listen to me."

The queen made a sign that she listened.

"You promised me to come to the ball," said Charles.

"I?" exclaimed Marguerite.

"Yes: and after your promise, you are expected; and therefore, if you do not come, everybody will be surprised at not seeing you."

"Excuse me, brother," replied Marguerite; "you see how very ill I am."

"Exert yourself."

Marguerite endeavored for a moment to summon courage and then suddenly giving way again, sank on her sofa.

"No, no, I cannot go," she said.

Charles took her hand, seated himself beside her on the sofa and said:

"You have just lost a dear friend, Margot, I know full well. But look at me—have not I lost all my friends, and, moreover, my mother? You have time to bewail as you now do; but I, at the moment of my severest grief., am always forced to smile—you suffer, but look at me! I am dying. Well, then, Margot, rouse thee; courage, girl! I ask thee, sister, for our name's honor. 'Tis an agony that we bear for the sake of our house: let us bear it, then, let us bear it, my beloved sister, courageously and resignedly."

"Oh, *mon Dieu, mon Dieu!*" exclaimed Marguerite.

"Yes," said Charles, following up the train of his reflections, "yes the sacrifice is severe, my dear sister: but every one has his trials—some of their honor; others, of their life. Do you suppose, that, at twenty-five, and the most splendid throne in the world, I do not regret dying? Well, then, look at me! My eyes, my complexion, my lips are those of a dying man; yet my smile—would not my smile make all the world believe that I still hope? Yet in a week, a fortnight, a month at most, you will weep for me, my sister dear, as you do for him who died to-day."

"Dearest brother!" cried Marguerite, throwing her arms round Charles's neck.

"Come, dress yourself, dear Marguerite," said the king; "hide your paleness, and appear at the ball. I have desired that they should bring you some new jewels and ornaments worthy of your beauty."

"Oh, what are jewels and ornaments to me now!" exclaimed Marguerite.

"Life is long, Marguerite!" said Charles, with a smile, "at least, for you."

"No! no!"

"Sister, recollect one thing: it is sometimes by stifling, or rather dissimulating our suffering, that we show most honor to the dead."

"Well, sire," said Marguerite, shuddering, "I will attend the ball."

A tear, rapidly dried upon his parched eyelid, moistened Charles's eye for a moment. He kissed his sister's brow, paused a moment before Henriette, who had not seen or heard him, and then retired, saying, as he did so ·

"Poor girl!"

"Get everything ready to dress me, Gillonne," said Marguerite,

The lady-in-waiting looked at her mistress in astonishment.

"Yes," said Marguerite, in a tone whose bitterness is indescribable, "yes, I shall dress: I am going to the ball—they expect me. Make haste, then, the day will then be complete: the fête at the Grève in the morning—the fête at the Louvre in the evening."

"And the duchess?" asked Gillonne.

"Ah, she—she is quite happy! She may remain here—she may weep—suffer at her ease. She is not a king's daughter, a king's wife, a king's sister: she is not a queen. Help me to dress, Gillonne."

The young lady obeyed. The new ornaments sent by the king were splendid, and the dresses gorgeous. Marguerite had never looked so magnificently beautiful.

She looked at herself in a glass, and said : " My brother is right—a human being is a miserable creature."

Gillonne entered at this moment.

"Madame," she said, "here is a man asking after you."

"Who is he ?"

"I do not know, but he is very horrid-looking ; his very appearance made me tremble."

"Go and ask his name," said Marguerite, turning very pale.

Gillonne went out, and returning after a few minutes, said :

"He would not tell his name, madame, but begged me to give you this."

And Gillonne handed to Marguerite the reliquary which she had given to La Mole the night previous.

"Oh, bring him hither—bring him hither!" said the queen, eagerly, and becoming even more pale and her features more rigid.

A heavy step was heard upon the floor and then a man appeared on the threshold.

"You are——?" said the queen.

"He whom you saw one day near Montfauçon, madame, and who conveyed in his tumbril two wounded gentlemen to the Louvre."

"Yes, yes, I recognize you—you are Maître Caboche."

"Executioner of the provostry of Paris, madame."

These were the only words which Henriette had heard of all those that had been spoken around her for the last hour. She then raised her pale face from her two hands, and looked at the headsman with her piercing eyes, which seemed to dart flames.

"And you come——" said Marguerite, tremulously.

"To remind you of the promise made to the youngest of the two gentlemen, him who charged me to return this reliquary to you. Do you recollect, madame ?"

"Yes, yes!" cried the queen, "and never shall more noble shade have nobler satisfaction—but where is *it?*"

"It is at my abode, with the body."

"Why did you not bring it?"

"I might have been stopped at the wicket of the Louvre, and compelled to open my cloak; what would have been said if a head had been discovered underneath?"

"True, true; keep it at your house, and I will come for it to-morrow."

"To-morrow, madame—to-morrow?" said Maître Caboche, "it may be too late!"

"And wherefore?"

"Because the queen-mother desired me to keep for her magic experiments the heads of the first two criminals I should execute."

"Oh, profanation! the heads of our beloved!—Henriette," exclaimed Marguerite, running towards her friend, whom she found standing up as if a spring had placed her on her feet, "Henriette, my darling friend, do you hear what this man says?"

"Yes, and what are we to do?"

"We must accompany him;" and Marguerite threw a velvet cloak over her shoulders. "Come, come," she said, "we shall see them once more."

Marguerite took Henriette by the arm, and, going down the secret staircase, made a sign to Caboche to follow. At the door was her litter, and at the wicket they found Caboche's servant with a lantern.

Marguerite's bearers were trustworthy men, deaf and dumb, and worthier of confidence than beasts of burthen.

They entered the litter, and were conveyed onwards, until, suddenly stopping, the headsman opened the door.

Marguerite alighted, and aided the Duchess de Nevers.

In their excessive grief, which thus tried them both, it was the nervous temperament that now gained the ascendant over the more powerfully organized frame.

"You may enter, ladies," said Caboche; "everybody is asleep in the tower."

At the same moment the light in the two windows was extinguished, and the two ladies, clinging to each other, passed under the gothic door, and went along in darkness over a rugged and slippery pavement.

Caboche, with a torch in his hand, led them into a chamber, low and blackened with smoke.

In a conspicuous place was nailed to the wall a parchment sealed with the king's seal: it was the headsman's brevet.

In a corner was a large sword, with a long handle: it was the flaming sword of justice.

Here and there were seen several large images, representing saints under different kinds of martyrdom.

Having arrived here, Caboche made a low bow.

"Your majesty will pardon me," he said, "if I have dared to penetrate to the Louvre and conduct you hither; but it was the last and earnest wish of the gentlemen; so——"

"You have done well, maître," said Marguerite, "and this will recompense your zealous service."

Caboche eyed sorrowfully the purse, well filled with gold, which Marguerite placed on the table.

"Gold! gold! always gold!" he muttered. "Alas, madame, why cannot I redeem at the price of gold the blood I have been compelled to shed to-day!"

"Maître," replied Marguerite, with painful hesitation, "I do not see——"

Caboche took the flambeau, opened an outer door, which, opening on to the staircase, led by a few steps into a cellar. At the same moment a current of air passed, which drove several sparks out of the torch, and brought up with it the nauseous smell of damp and blood.

Henriette, white as a marble statue, leaned on the arm of her friend, who moved with a more assured step; but at the first stair she staggered.

"I shall never be able——" she exclaimed.

"When one loves well, Henriette," replied the queen, "we love even beyond death itself."

It was a horrid and touching sight to see those two women, resplendent in youth, beauty, and attire, bending under this sordid and chalky vault, the weaker leaning on the stronger, and the stronger clinging to the headsman's arm.

They reached the lowest step.

On the floor of this cellar lay two human forms, covered with a large cloth of black serge.

Caboche raised a corner of this mort-cloth, and lowering his torch, said :

"Look, your majesty !"

In their black attire, the two young men lay side by side, in the fearful symmetry of death. Their heads, placed close on their bodies, seemed only divided from them by a red circle round the neck. Death had not separated their hands, for either by accident, or the pious attention of the headsman, the right hand of La Mole reposed in the left hand of Coconnas.

There was a look of love beneath the eyelids of La Mole ; there was a smile of disdain under those of Coconnas.

Marguerite knelt down beside her lover, and, with her hands glittering with jewels, gently raised the head of him she had loved so well.

The Duchess de Nevers, leaning against the wall, could not take her eyes off that pale face she had so often gazed upon with joy and love.

"La Mole ! dearest La Mole !" murmured Marguerite.

"Annibal ! Annibal !" cried the duchess. "So handsome, so proud, so brave, why dost thou not answer me ?" and a torrent of tears gushed from her eyes.

Marguerite then put into a bag, embroidered with pearls and perfumed with the finest essences, the head of La Mole, which looked still more striking when in contact with the velvet and gold, and whose beauty a peculiar preparation, used at the period in royal embalmings, could not fail to preserve.

Henriette folded the head of Coconnas in the skirt of her mantle. And both, bending beneath their poignant sorrow, ascended the stairs, after one last lingering look at the loved remains they left to the mercy of an executioner, in this gloomy den of common criminals.

"Fear nothing, madame," said Caboche, who comprehended the look; "the gentlemen shall be buried in holy ground: this I swear to you."

"And have masses said for their souls, which this will pay for," said Henriette, taking from her neck a magnificent necklace of rubies, which she gave to the headsman.

They returned to the Louvre, and the queen, going to her own apartments, deposited the melancholy relic in the cabinet of her bedchamber, destined from that moment to become an oratory; then, leaving Henriette in her room, the queen, paler and lovelier than ever, about ten o'clock entered the splendid ball-room—the scene in which we commenced the first chapter of this our history, two years and a half previously.

All eyes were turned towards her, and she supported the universal gaze with a proud and almost joyous look, for she had religiously accomplished the dying wish of the beloved of her heart.

Charles, when he saw her, passed through the gilded throng, and said aloud:

"Thanks, my dear sister!" and then, in a lower tone: "Mind! you have a spot of blood upon your arm."

"What consequence is that, sire, if I have but a smile upon my lips?"

CHAPTER LXII.

THE SWEAT OF BLOOD.

Some days after the terrible scene we have related, that is, on the 30th of May, 1574, the court was at Vincennes, when suddenly a great noise was heard in the antechamber of the king, who had been ill in the midst of a grand ball he had given the very day of the young men's execution, and by advice of his physicians had come to Vincennes for change of air.

It was eight o'clock in the morning; a small group of courtiers was assembled in the antechamber, when the nurse appeared at the door of the royal apartment, crying:

"Help! help! the king is dying!"

"The king is worse, then?" said De Nancey, whom, as we have seen, Charles had attached to his own person.

"Oh, summon the doctors! summon the doctors!" cried the nurse.

Mazille and Ambroise Paré attended the king by turns, and Paré, having seen Charles fall asleep, had profited by the opportunity to retire for a few moments.

Meantime, Charles had broken into a profuse perspiration, and as he suffered from a relaxation of the capillary vessels, which occasions hemorrhage of the skin, this strange appearance had alarmed the nurse, who, being a Protestant, declared it was a judgment for the blood shed in the massacre of St. Bartholomew. Every one hastened in search of the doctor, in order to display his zeal and activity.

A door suddenly opened, and Catherine appeared; she traversed the antechamber, and entered the king's apartment.

Charles was lying across the bed, his eyes closed, and his chest heaving; his body was covered with a reddish perspiration, and from the end of each finger hung a drop of blood.

At the sound of steps Charles looked up, and beheld his mother.

"Excuse me, madame," said he, "I would fain die in peace."

"Die!" replied Catherine; "do not thus be discouraged, this is a passing attack."

"I tell you, *mort de tout les diables!* I am dying—I know it, and I feel it!"

"Sire," said the queen, "your mind is diseased; since the death of those two assassins, La Mole and Coconnas, your bodily sufferings ought to have abated, and as for your mental anguish, if I had ten minutes' conversation with you, I could prove——"

"Nurse," interrupted Charles, "let no one enter: the

Queen Catherine de Medicis wishes to speak with her beloved son, Charles the Ninth."

The nurse obeyed.

"This interview must have taken place," continued he, "sooner or later, and perhaps to-morrow it may be too late, but a third person must be present."

"Why?"

"Because, I repeat," said Charles, with a terrible solemnity, "Death is at the door of this chamber, and may enter one moment from another, and it is time to put my affairs in order."

"And who is this third person?"

"My brother."

"Sire" said the queen, "I see with pleasure that these denunciations, dictated by hate rather than pain, have not left any prejudice on your mind. Nurse—nurse!"

The nurse appeared.

"Nurse," said Catherine, "when M. de Nancey comes, order him in the king's name to summon M. d'Alençon."

Charles made a sign to the nurse to stay.

"I said my brother,' repeated he.

Catherine's eyes glistened with rage, but an imperious gesture of Charles stopped her.

"I wish to speak with my brother Henry of Navarre," continued he; "he alone is my brother."

"And do you think," cried the queen, daring (so great was her hate to Henry) to brave Charles's anger, "do you think, that if you are really, as you say, dying, I will suffer a stranger to usurp my right as a queen and as a mother, to be present at your last moments?"

"Madame," said Charles, "I am yet king—I yet command; and if you will not summon Henry, I have yet strength enough left to fetch him myself."

And Charles half rose from the bed.

"Sire," cried Catherine, detaining him, "think what you do—as for me, the laws of nature and of etiquette alike bid me stay."

"By what title do you stay?"

"By that of your mother."

"You are no more my mother than D'Alençon is my brother."

"You rave! when did I forfeit that title?"

"When you took away that which you gave."

"What mean you, Charles? I do not understand you," murmured Catherine, all amazement.

Charles felt under his pillow, and drew forth a small silver key.

"Take this key, open my traveling-casket there, and you will find papers that will speak for me."

Charles pointed to a casket of carved oak, fastened with a silver lock, that stood in the center of the apartment.

Catherine, controlled, spite of herself, by Charles's terrible look, opened the casket; but no sooner had she done so, then she recoiled, as if she had seen a serpent inside it.

"What do you see that alarms you, madame?" asked Charles.

"Nothing," said Catherine.

"Then put your hand in, and give me a book; for there is one there—is there not?"

"Yes," faltered Catherine.

"A book of venerie?"

"Yes."

"Bring it to me."

Catherine, trembling in every limb, did as he bade her.

"Fatality!" murmured she.

"Listen," continued Charles. "This book—I was foolish—I loved the chase above everything—I read this book too much. Do you understand?"

Catherine uttered a suppressed groan.

"It was a folly!" said Charles. "Burn it, madame, the world must not know the weaknesses of kings."

Catherine advanced to the fire, cast the fatal book in, and stood, motionless and haggard, watching the blue flames that devoured the poisoned leaves of the volume.

As it burned, a strong odor, like garlic, pervaded the apartment.

It was soon entirely consumed.

"And now, madame," said the king, with irresistible majesty, "summon my brother Henry."

Catherine, overwhelmed, crushed beneath a complicated emotion she could not analyze, quitted the room.

"Curse him!" cried she, as she passed the threshold, "he triumphs—he reaches the goal! Curse him!—curse him!"

"Henry!—my brother Henry!" cried Charles, following his mother with his voice; "I wish to see him instantly, to speak about the regency."

At this moment, Ambroise Paré entered by the opposite door.

"Who has been burning arsenic here?" said he.

"I have," replied Charles.

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE PLATFORM OF THE DONJON AT VINCENNES.

Henry of Navarre was walking along on the terrace of the donjon. He knew the court was at the château, and it seemed to him he could see, through the walls, Charles on his death-bed. It was a summer's eve. A broad ray of light bathed the distant plains, and gilded the stems of the old oaks in the forest.

But it was not on these objects that Henry fixed his attention; he was gazing, in thought, on the capital of France.

"Paris!" murmured he—"Paris! where is the Louvre—the Louvre, where is the throne! and here do these ramparts shut me out from thee, to confine me with my mortal enemy!"

As his thoughts wandered from Paris back to Vincennes, he saw on the left, in a valley, a man whose cuirass sparkled in the sunbeams. This man was on a splendid charger, and led another.

The king fixed his eyes on this cavalier, and saw him draw his sword, place his handkerchief on it, and wave it in the air. Instantly the signal was repeated from the next hill; and continued until the king saw it extend all round the château.

It was De Mouy and his Huguenots, who, knowing the king was dying, and fearing lest Henry's life should be in danger, had collected, and were ready to defend him.

Henry shaded his eyes with his hand, and recognizing the cavalier:

"De Mouy!" cried he, as though his friend could hear him.

And he hastily undid his scarf, and waved it in return.

All the handkerchiefs were again waved.

"Ah, they wait for me!" said he. "I cannot join them. Why did I not do so when it was in my power!"

And he made a despairing gesture, that De Mouy returned by another, which meant, "I will wait."

At this moment Henry heard steps on the stairs: he disappeared; and, as if by magic, the troop outside disappeared also.

Henry saw, and not without a secret dread, his mortal foe, Catherine de Medicis, appear on the terrace.

"Oh," thought he, "it must be something important, indeed, that makes her come and seek me on the platform of the donjon of Vincennes."

Catherine sat down on a stone bench, to recover her breath.

Henry approached her.

"Are you seeking me, madame?" asked he.

"Yes," replied Catherine; "I wished to give you a proof of my attachment—the king desires to see you."

"Me?"

"Yes. He thinks that not content with desiring the throne of Navarre, you covet that of France also."

"Oh, madame!"

"I know it is not true, but he believes it, and lays a snare for you."

"What will he, then, offer me?"

"How do I know?—impossibilities, perhaps."

"But have you no idea?"

"No; but suppose, for instance——'

"What?"

"Suppose, Henry, he were to offer you a temptation—the regency!"

Henry felt a thrill of joy pervade him, but he saw the snare, and avoided it.

"Oh," said he, "the trick would be too palpable; offer me the regency, when there is yourself, when there is D'Alençon!"

"You will refuse it, then?" replied Catherine.

"The king is dead," thought Henry; "she has laid a trap for me.—I must hear what the king says, madame, for you know all this is but supposition."

"Doubtless; but you can tell me your intentions."

"*Mon Dieu!*" said Henry, "I have no pretensions, and so can have no intentions."

"That is no answer," replied Catherine; "but to be short with you—for there is no time to lose—if you accept the regency you are a dead man."

"The king lives," thought Henry. "Madame," said he, firmly, "God will inspire me, for the hearts of kings are in His hands. I am ready to see his majesty."

"Reflect, monsieur!"

"During two years that I have been persecuted, and a month that I have been a prisoner, I have had time for reflection and I have reflected. Favor me, therefore, by informing the king of my coming. These two guards would prevent my escape, even did I contemplate flight, which I do not."

Catherine saw she could do nothing more, and hastily descended.

No sooner had she disappeared than Henry made a sign to De Mouy, that meant, "Draw nearer."

De Mouy sprang into the saddle, and advanced within a musket-shot of the château.

Henry waved his hand, and hastened after the queen.

On the first landing he found the two sentinels awaiting him.

A double troop of Swiss and light horse guarded the court, and to enter or leave the château it was necessary to traverse a double rank of halberds. Catherine was waiting there for him.

"Look!" said she, laying her hand on his arm. "This court has two gates; at this, behind the king's apartment, if you refuse the regency, a good horse and freedom await you. If you follow the dictates of ambition—what say you?"

"I say that if the king makes me regent, I, and not you, shall command these soldiers."

"Madman!" murmured Catherine; "be warned, and do not play at life and death with me!"

"Why not?" said Henry, "since, up to this time, I have been the gainer."

"Go to the king's apartments, sir, since you will not listen to me," said Catherine, pointing to the stairs with one hand, whilst the other sought the handle of one of the poisoned daggers she wore at her girdle in the shagreen case which has become historical.

"Pass before me, madame," said Henry; "until I am regent, you have the precedence."

Catherine, foiled at every point, made no resistance, but ascended the stairs before Henry.

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE REGENCY.

The king had become impatient, and was on the point of sending De Nancey in search of Henry, when the latter appeared.

On seeing him, Charles uttered a cry of joy. The two doctors and the priest, who were with the king, instantly rose and quitted the chamber.

Charles was not greatly beloved, and yet all the courtiers in the antechambers were weeping. At the death of every king, good or bad, there are some persons who fear they shall lose by it.

Charles smiled mournfully.

"Come here, Harry," said he, holding out his hand to him; "come here. I was unhappy at not seeing you, for, believe me, I have often reproached myself with having tormented you; but a king cannot control events, and, besides, my mother and D'Anjou and D'Alençon, and something else, which now that I am dying does not influence me, influenced me then—state policy."

"Sire," replied Henry, "I only recollect the love I bear you as my brother."

"Ah, you are right to think thus, and I am grateful to you for it," said Charles. "But let us not think of the past, but of the future, for it is that I am alarmed about."

And the poor king hid his face in his hands.

After a moment's silence, he continued:

"We must save the state—we must not let it fall into the hands of fanatics or women."

Charles spoke these words in a low tone, and yet Henry fancied he heard a suppressed exclamation of rage."

"Of women?" said he, anxious to provoke an explanation.

"Yes, for my mother would fain be regent until D'Anjou's return; but, I tell you, he will not return."

"How, not return?" cried Henry, his heart beating joyfully.

"No, his subjects will not let him."

"But do you not think the queen-mother has already written to him?"

"Yes; but Nancey stopped the courier at Château Thierry, and brought me the letter, in which she said I was dying. I wrote to Warsaw myself, and D'Anjou will be carefully watched, so that in all probability the throne will become vacant."

Another angry sound was heard behind the tapestry.

"She is there," thought Henry, "and is listening."

Charles heard nothing.

"I die without male heirs," continued he.

Then, stopping suddenly, he looked at the King of Navarre.

"Do you recollect, Harry," said he, "the little boy I showed you one night, sleeping peacefully in his cradle, and watched over by an angel? Alas, they will kill him also!"

"Oh no, no!" cried Henry, with tears in his eyes; "I swear to you that I will watch over and protect him with my life."

"Thanks, Harry, thanks!" said the king gratefully; "I accept your promise; do not make him a king (fortunately, he is not born to a throne), but make him happy; I leave him an ample fortune, and I am now more resigned since you have promised to protect him."

Henry reflected.

"I have promised," said he; "but can I fulfil my word?"

"What mean you?"

"Shall I not be persecuted, and in more danger than he is, since I am a man, and he but an infant?"

"You are mistaken," said Charles; "after my death you shall be great and powerful."

At these words he drew a parchment from under his pillow.

"Here!" said he.

Henry hastily glanced over the document.

"The regency for me?"

"Yes, until D'Anjou's return; and, as he will not return, in all probability it is the throne I give you."

"The throne!"

"You alone are worthy of it—you alone capable of governing. D'Alençon is a traitor—leave him in the prison I have consigned him to. My mother will seek to kill you—banish her. D'Anjou will quit Poland in three months, perhaps in a year, reply to him by a papal bull. I have already arranged that matter, and you will receive the document shortly."

"Oh, my king!"

"You have but one thing to fear—civil war; but, by remaining converted, you will avoid that. The Protestants can do nothing unless you are at their head, for Condé is comparatively nothing. They say I feel remorse for the Bartholomew: doubts, yes!—remorse, no! They say I bleed the blood then shed at every pore; what flows from me is arsenic, and not blood."

"Oh, what mean you, sire?"

"Nothing; God will, if he think fit, avenge my death. I leave you a faithful parliament and a trusty army. They will protect you against your only enemies—my mother and D'Alençon."

At this moment the sound of arms was heard in the vestibule.

"I am lost," murmured Henry.

"You fear—you hesitate," said Charles.

"No, I accept."

Charles pressed his hand.

"Nurse," cried he: "nurse, summon my mother and M. d'Alençon."

CHAPTER LXV.

THE KING IS DEAD! GOD SAVE THE KING.

CATHERINE and D'Alençon entered together. As Henry had conjectured, the queen had overheard all, and had in a few words acquainted D'Alençon with what had passed.

Henry stood by the head of the king's bed.

The king commenced thus:

"Madame," said he, to his mother, "if I had a son, he would be king, and you would be regent; in your stead, did you decline, the King of Poland; in his stead, did he decline, D'Alençon; but I have no son, and the throne belongs to D'Anjou, who is absent. I do not choose, therefore, to place a man almost his equal on the throne, at the risk of exciting a civil war; I do not, therefore make you regent, because it would be painful for you to choose between your two sons; I do not, therefore, make D'Alençon regent, because he might say to D'Anjou, 'You had a throne,—why have you quitted it?' No; I have, therefore, chosen the fittest person for regent. Salute him, madame—salute him, D'Alençon: it is the King of Navarre!"

And with a gesture of supreme authority he himself saluted Henry: Catherine and D'Alençon made a motion between a shudder and a salute.

"Here, my lord regent," said Charles, "is the parchment that, until the return of D'Anjou, gives you the command of the kingdom."

Catherine devoured Henry with her eyes; D'Alençon turned deadly pale, and could hardly stand.

Henry, making a violent effort, took the warrant from Charles, and drawing himself up to his full height, fixed his eyes on the queen, as if to say, "Beware, I am your master!"

"No, never!" said Catherine; "never shall my race yield to a foreign one! Never shall a Bourbon reign whilst a Valois remains!"

"Mother!" cried Charles, sitting up, "I am yet king, and have strength enough to give an order; it does not require much time to punish murderers and poisoners."

"Give the order if you dare—I will give mine!"

And she left the room, followed by D'Alençon.

"Nancey!" cried Charles; "Nancey; arrest my mother and brother!"

A stream of blood choked his utterance.

De Nancey entered; he had only heard his name; the rest of the order had not reached him.

"Guard the door," said Henry, "and let no one enter!"

Nancey bowed, and left the apartment. Henry looked at the dying king.

"The fatal moment is come!" said he. "Shall I reign? Shall I live?"

"Live, sire!" said a voice.

The tapestry of the alcove was lifted, and René's pale face appeared.

"René?" cried Henry.

"Yes, sire."

"Your prediction was false, then—I shall not be king?"

"You shall be; but the time has not yet come."

"How do you know? Speak!"

"Listen!"

"I listen."

"Stoop!"

Henry leaned over the bed, and René did the same; between them lay the body of the dying king.

"Listen!" said René. "Placed here by the queen-mother to undo you, I prefer to serve you; for I have faith in your horoscope."

"Is it the queen-mother who bade you tell me that?"

"No," said René; "I will tell you a secret: the King of Poland will soon be here!"

"No—for the king stopped the courier at Château Thierry."

"The queen had sent three, by different routes."

"Oh, I am lost!" said Henry.

"A messenger arrived this morning from Warsaw. No one knows of Charles's illness there; D'Anjou quitted that city without opposition, and the courier only preceded him by a few hours."

"Oh, had I but eight days!" muttered Henry.

"You have not eight hours! did you not hear the noise of the arms in the vestibule? The soldiers will come even here to kill you."

"The king is not dead yet."

"No," said René, "but he will be in ten minutes; you have ten minutes to live."

"What shall I do, then?"

"Fly instantly."

"How? If I cross the vestibule, they will kill me there."

"Listen! I risk everything for you;—do not forget it."

"Fear me not."

"Follow me through this passage; it will conduct you to the postern. I will, to gain time, tell the queen you are coming; they will think afterwards you have discovered the secret door, and escaped."

Henry stooped, and kissed Charles's forehead.

"Adieu, my brother;" said he; "I will not forget your last wish was to see me king. Die in peace; in the name of my brethren I forgive you their blood you have spilt."

Henry seized Charles's sword, placed the precious parchment in his breast, pressed his lips again to Charles's forehead, and disappeared by the secret passage.

"Nurse!" murmured the king; "nurse!"

"What do you want, Charlot?" cried she.

"Nurse, whilst I have been sleeping, something strange has happened; for I see a great light, and saints interceding with God for me. Pardon me, my God! Pardon the crimes of the king, in compassion for the sufferings of the man! I come! I come!"

And Charles, who had risen nearly to his feet, fell back dead into his nurse's arms.

Meantime, Henry, guided by René, traversed the passage, passed through the postern, and springing on his horse, galloped towards De Mouy.

The sentinels, hearing the horse, moved forward and cried:

"He flies—he flies!"

"Who flies?" said the queen.

"The King of Navarre."

"Fire on him—fire!" said the queen.

The sentinels leveled their pieces, but the king was out of reach.

"He flies!" said Catherine; he is vanquished, then!"

"He flies!" muttered D'Alençon; I am king, then!"

But at this moment the drawbridge was hastily lowered, and a young man galloped into the court, followed by four gentlemen crying, "*France, France!*"

"My son!" cried Catherine, joyfully.

"My mother!" replied the young man, springing to the ground.

"D'Anjou !" exclaimed François, thunderstruck.

"Am I too late ?" said Henry d'Anjou.

"No, you are just in time—listen !"

At this moment De Nancey appeared at the balcony of the king's apartment: all eyes were fixed on him.

He broke a wand he held in two pieces, and holding a fragment in either hand :

"King Charles the Ninth is dead ! King Charles the Ninth is dead ! King Charles the Ninth is dead !" cried he three times.

And he let fall the fragments of the wand.

"Charles the Ninth is dead !" said Catherine, crossing herself; "God save Henry the Third !"

All repeated the cry, with the exception of D'Alençon.

"She has betrayed me," said he.

"I have conquered," cried Catherine, "and the odious Béarnais will not reign !"

CHAPTER LXVI.

EPILOGUE.

A YEAR had elapsed since the death of Charles IX., and the accession of his successor.

King Henry III., happily reigning by the grace of God and his mother Catherine, had gone in a fine procession in honor of Nôtre Dame de Clery.

He had gone on foot with the queen, his wife, and all the court.

King Henry III. was able to afford himself this little pastime, for no serious business occupied him at the moment : the King of Navarre was in Navarre, where he had so long desired to be ; and they said was very much taken up with a beautiful girl of the blood of the Montmorencies, whom he called *la Fosseuse* (dimple-cheek). Marguerite was with him, sad and gloomy, and finding only in her beautiful mountains, not an amusement, but a soother of the two great griefs of human life—absence and death.

Paris was very quiet, and the queen-mother, really regent since her dear son Henry was king, resided sometimes at the Louvre, sometimes at the Hôtel de Soissons.

One evening, when she was deeply occupied in studying the stars with Réne, whose little treason she had never detected, and who had been reinstated in her favor, after the false testimony he had so opportunely borne against La Mole and Coconnas, she was informed that a man desired to see her who had a matter of the utmost importance to communicate.

She went hastily to her oratory, and found the Sire de Maurevel.

"HE is here!" exclaimed the ancient captain of the Petardiers, not giving Catherine time to address him, according to royal etiquette.

"What HE?" she asked.

"Who can it be, madame, but the King of Navarre?"

"Here?" cried Catherine. "Here!—he—Henry!—and what is the madman doing here?"

"If appearances may be trusted, he has come to see Madame de Sauve; if probabilities are considered, he comes to conspire against the king."

"How did you know he was here?"

"Because I saw him enter a house here yesterday, and, very soon afterwards, Madame de Sauve joined him there."

"Are you sure it was he?"

"I waited until he came out. At three o'clock, the two lovers appeared. The king conducted Madame de Sauve to the wicket of the Louvre. There the porter, who is no doubt in her interest, admitted her, and she entered without interruption, and the king returned humming a tune, and with a step as free and unconcerned as if he were amongst his mountains in Béarn."

"And whither did he betake himself?"

"Rue de l'Arbre-Sec, to the hotel of the *Belle Etoile*, at the same man's where the two sorcerers lodged whom your majesty executed last year."

"Why did you not come and inform me the moment you first saw him?"

"Because I was not quite sure of my man."

"Whilst now——"

"I am perfectly certain."

"You saw him, then?"

"Perfectly. I concealed myself at the wine shop in front of the house, and saw him enter the same place as on the previous night. Then, as Madame de Sauve was late, he imprudently put his face against the window on the first-floor, and then I had no further doubt. Besides, a few moments afterwards, Madame de Sauve came and rejoined him."

"And do you think they will remain, as they did last night, until three o'clock in the morning!"

"It is probable."

"Where is the house you mention?"

"Near the Croix-des-Petits-Champs, close by Saint Honoré."

"Very good!" replied Catherine. "Does Monsieur de Sauve know your handwriting?"

"No," said Maurevel.

"Sit down there and write."

Maurevel obeyed.

"I am ready, madame," said he.

Catherine dictated:

"Whilst the Baron de Sauve is on service at the Louvre, his wife is with her lover in a house near the Croix-des-Petits-Champs, Rue Saint Honoré. The baron will recognize the house by a red cross on the wall."

"Well?"

"Now make a second copy of this letter."

Maurevel did so.

"Now," continued the queen, "let this billet be given adroitly to the baron, and let fall the other in the corridor of the Louvre."

"I do not understand."

Catherine shrugged her shoulders.

"You do not see that a husband who receives such a letter must be angry."

"In the King of Navarre's time he was not offended."

"Do you not know there is a great difference between a king and an exile? Besides, if he is not offended, you will be for him."

"I?"

"Yes; take four or six men, masked. You burst open the door—you surprise the lovers—you strike, in the baron's name, and the next day, the letter found in the Louvre proves that it is the husband who revenged himself, only it happened the lover was the King of Navarre; but who could think he was there, when every one believed he was at Pau?"

Maurevel bowed and withdrew.

Just as he quitted the Hôtel de Soissons, Madame de Sauve entered the house of the Croix-des-Petits-Champs.

Henry was waiting for her.

"Have you been followed?" said he.

"No," said Charlotte, "not that I know of."

"I think I have; not only to-night, but last evening also."

"Oh, sire, you terrify me. I should be inconsolable if anything were to happen to you."

"Fear nothing, love," said the Béarnais, "three faithful followers watch over me."

"Only three?"

"Three are sufficient, when they are called De Mouy, Saucourt, and Barthèlemy."

"De Mouy is then at Paris? Has he, like you, some poor lady in love with him?"

"No; but a mortal enemy, whose death he has sworn to compass. Nothing else but hate makes men commit such follies as they commit in love."

"Thank you, sire!"

"Oh, I do not speak of our present follies, but those past and to come. But let us leave off this conversation, for my time is short."

"You leave Paris, then?"

"To-night."

"Your affairs in Paris are finished?"

"My only business was to see you."

"Gascon!"

"*Ma mie,* it is true; but we have a few more hours to pass together, and then we separate forever."

"Oh, Henry," said Charlotte, "nothing but my love lasts forever."

It was arranged that Henry should leave the house at twelve o'clock, that he and his companions should escort Madame de Sauve to the Louvre, and should go from thence to the Rue de Cerisaie, where Maurevel dwelt.

The three Huguenots had been on guard about an hour when they saw a man, followed at some distance by five others, approach the door of the house, and apply successively several keys to the lock.

At this sight, De Mouy sprang from his concealment, and catching the man by the arm:

"Stay!" said he; "you do not enter there!"

The man started, and his hat fell off.

"De Mouy de Saint-Phale!" cried he.

"Maurevel!" thundered the Huguenot, brandishing his sword; "I sought you, and you come to find me!"

But he did not forget Henry, and turning to the window, he whistled like the Béarnese shepherds.

"That is sufficient," said he to Saucourt.

"Now then, murderer!"

Maurevel had time to draw a pistol from his belt, and leveling it at the young man:

"This time," said the king's slayer, "you are dead."

But De Mouy sprang on one side, and the ball passed by him.

"It is my turn now!" cried he; and he dealt Maurevel so terrible a thrust with his rapier, that it traversed his thick buff belt, and inflicted a severe wound.

Maurevel uttered so piercing a cry, that his followers thought he was killed, and ran away down the Rue St. Honoré.

Maurevel, seeing himself abandoned, took to flight, crying, "Help! help!"

De Mouy, Saucourt, and Barthèlemy pursued him hotly.

As they entered the Rue de Grenelle, a man sprang out of a window on the first-floor.

It was Henry.

Warned by De Mouy's signal, and by the report of the pistol, that something had occurred, he hastened to the assistance of his friends.

Active and vigorous, he dashed after them sword in hand.

A cry guided him; it came from the Barrier des Sergens; it was Maurevel, who, hard pressed by De Mouy, called again for help.

He was forced to turn, or else be run through the back: he turned, therefore, and thrust fiercely at De Mouy, and pierced his scarf; De Mouy lounged in his turn, and a second time wounded him.

"At him—at him!" cried Henry.

De Mouy needed no exhortation: he charged Maurevel again, who, pressing his hand over his wound, took to flight once more.

' Kill him quickly!" cried the king. "Here are the soldiers!"

Maurevel, breathless and exhausted could go no further; he fell on one knee, and presented his sword-point to De Mouy.

"They are only two!" cried he. "Fire—fire!"

Saucourt and Barthèlemy had been carried away in pursuit of the other soldiers, so that De Mouy and the king found themselves opposed to four men.

"Fire!" cried Maurevel, whilst one of the soldiers prepared his arquebuss.

"Yes; but first die—assassin, murderer, traitor—die!"

So saying, De Mouy seized Maurevel's sword with one hand, and plunged his own so violently into his breast, that he pinned him to the earth.

"Take care—take care!" cried Henry.

De Mouy sprang back, leaving his sword in the body of Maurevel, for a soldier was in the act of firing at him.

Henry instantly passed his sword through the soldier's body, who fell, uttering a cry.

The two others betook themselves to flight.

"Come, De Mouy, come!" said Henry. "We have not a moment to lose; if we are recognized, we are lost!"

"One moment, sire, whilst I recover my sword. You do not suppose I would leave it sticking in the body of that wretch!"

He went towards Maurevel, who lay, to all appearance, deprived of motion, but the moment that De Mouy laid his hand on the hilt of the sword which had remained in his body, he raised himself, with the petronel in his hand, which the soldier had dropped as he fell, and placing the muzzle full against De Mouy's breast, pulled the trigger.

De Mouy fell without a cry. He was killed outright.

Henry rushed towards Maurevel, but he had fallen again, and the king's sword pierced only a dead carcase.

It was necessary for him to flee; the noise had attracted a great number of persons, and the guard might arrive. Henry then looked about him, to see if there was a face he knew, and gave a cry of joy, as he recognized Maître la Hurière.

"My dear La Hurière, look after De Mouy, I pray you; although I have great fear that he is past hope. Have him taken to your house, and if he still lives, spare no expense—here is my purse: as to the other, leave the scoundrel to rot in the kennel like a dog!"

"But yourself?" said La Hurière.

"I have a farewell to make. I will hasten, and be back with you in ten minutes. Have my horses ready."

Henry then hastened away in the direction of the little house in the Croix-des-Petits-Champs; but as he turned the corner, he stopped, in great alarm.

There was a great crowd before the door.

"What has happened in this house?" inquired Henry.

"Oh," replied a bystander, "a terrible affair, sir! A beautiful lady has been stabbed by her husband, to whom some one had sent a note, informing him that she was there with her lover."

"And the husband ?" cried Henry.

"Has gone."

"The wife ?"

"Is there still."

"Dead ?"

"Not yet ; but there is no hope."

"Oh," exclaimed Henry, "cursed fate!" and he rushed into the house.

The room was filled with people, all surrounding the bed on which lay poor Charlotte, stabbed with two blows of a poniard. Her husband, who had for two years concealed his jealousy of Henry, had seized this opportunity of avenging himself.

"Charlotte, Charlotte!" cried Henry, falling on his knees at the bedside.

Charlotte opened her beautiful eyes, already veiled by death, and gave a cry which made the blood flow from her two wounds ; and making an effort to rise, she said :

"Oh, I was sure I could not die without seeing him once more!"

And, as if she had awaited the moment of Henry's coming to die, she pressed her lips on the King of Navarre's forehead, and murmuring for the last time, "I love thee!" fell back, and expired.

Henry could not remain a moment longer without his life being in jeopardy. He drew his dagger, cut off one of those long and fair tresses he had so often admired and pressed to his lips, and sobbing bitterly, amidst the sobs of the lookers-on, who had no idea that their sympathies were excited for persons of such high estate, left the room.

"Friend, mistress," cried Henry, in despair ; "all forsake me, all leave me, all fail me at once!"

"Yes, sire," said a man who had quitted the group before the house, and followed Henry : "but the throne is still left to you."

"René!" cried Henry.

"Yes, sire, René—who still watches over you. The wretch Maurevel named you as he died. They know you are in Paris—the archers are seeking for you—fly! fly!"

"And yet you say, René, that I, a fugitive, shall be king?"

"Look, sire," said the Florentine, pointing out to the king a star which appeared alone, brilliant amongst the folds of a golden cloud; "it is not I who say so, but *that!*"

Henry heaved a sigh and disappeared in the darkness.

THE END.

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